



BLUE AND GRAY WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904 by Frank Toukey, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 11.

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 21, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

HEMMED IN; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE'S HARD FIGHT.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE



Jack Clark and his boys were having a desperate fight at the door. Tom Peters locked the side door; but just then Mabel Ward, pallid and fearful, came down the ladder and cried:
"This way, if you would escape! Quick, for your lives!"

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CHAPTER I.

ON A PERILOUS MISSION.

The Valley of the Tennessee had seen some desperate fighting in the month of February, 1862.

The armies of the North and South were in close touch now, and some of the greatest battles of the Civil War were about to be fought.

Grant and McClelland on land, Foote and his gunboats on the water were winning victories, not, however, without great cost and much effort.

For the Confederate soldiers were brave and stood their ground desperately. They were fighting for what they believed to be their rights. So also were the Union soldiers.

Fort Henry had fallen.

General Grant had arrived on the scene too late to intercept Tilghman and his force as they abandoned the fort.

But the Army of the Tennessee very soon found opportunity to vindicate itself, which it proceeded to do.

A part of the main army were in bivouac on Panther Creek at the opening of our story.

General Grant was planning that great attack on Donelson, which as much as anything else made his reputation as a great commander.

Fort Henry and its stores were in the hands of the army. Foote had gone on up the Tennessee.

In this division encamped on Panther Creek was an independent company of youths known as the Fairdale Blues.

They came from a small town in New York State known as Fairdale. They were captained by a youth named Jack Clark. He was the son of one of the prominent citizens of the town and a handsome and fearless youth.

The first lieutenant was Hal Martin and the first sergeant Joe Ward and Corporal Tom Peters. All were boys of good family and brave to a fault.

The Blues had taken a prominent part in the fighting about Fort Henry.

Just now they were waiting orders, as were others. It was expected at any moment to get the order to move on Fort Donelson.

"Well, Hal," said Jack Clark, as he stepped out of his tent and glanced down the company street, "I feel that our ranks are full again. We lost fifteen men in that awful march down here."

"We are fully recruited," said Hal. "I think we are all ready for hot service."

"We shall see enough of it soon, I feel sure. But in the meantime I hope we are not doomed to inaction."

"That is so. Nothing is more irksome than idleness. Hello! What's that?"

Into the company street dashed a horse and rider.

He was an orderly. As he spurred up to the spot where Jack stood, he touched his cap and said:

"Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues?"

"Yes," replied Jack.

"Good! I have here a dispatch for you from General Grant."

Jack took the dispatch quickly and read it. His eyes flashed. He handed it to Hal.

Thus it read:

"To Captain Clark:

"Come to Fort Henry at once. I have some dangerous work for you and your brave boys. Do not fail.

"(Signed) U. S. GRANT."

Jack and Hal glanced at each other in a comprehensive way. Each wore an expression of delight upon his face.

"We are right in it, Jack," cried Hal. "This is a piece of luck. Anything to get out of these trenches."

"Even if it means a hard campaign."

"Yes."

"Come! We must go up to Fort Henry."

"You, yes! I will remain here, though, to look after the boys."

"Very well!" agreed Jack. "As soon as I learn what is wanted of us I will come back."

So Jack Clark set out for Fort Henry. He was soon waiting outside General Grant's headquarters.

When his turn came he was shown into the presence of the famous general. For a moment Grant looked at him in an inscrutable way.

"How do you do, Clark," he said curtly. "You got my dispatch?"

"Yes, sir. I am here in response to it."

"Good! Have a chair."

Jack sat down. General Grant looked at him for a time in a fixed way. He seemed in a reflective mood.

"You're a plucky fellow, Clark. I believe you are the best man I could select for what I have in mind."

"You may rest assured that the Blues will do their duty," replied Jack. "No matter what commission you may give them they will carry it out."

Grant nodded in a grateful way.

"I believe it, and that is why I sent for you," he said. "Now, I'll tell you what I want. South of here ten miles is the plantation of Colonel Carew. He is a breeder of fancy horses. He is one of the leaders in the Confederacy. I want you to quarter yourself and your boys on his farm. I don't care how unpleasant you make it for him. Now you are to make an outpost of Carew's farm. Fortify it a little and await developments.

"I will explain that a telegraph line is building somewhere down in that region. It will connect the Confederate Army with Nashville.

"I want you to capture it. No doubt it will be defended. But I trust you to capture it."

Jack listened with interest.

"I understand, General Grant," he said. "And your orders shall be obeyed."

"Very good," said the General with pleasure. "I feel sure you can do it."

Jack took his leave and went back at once to the camp on Panther Creek.

He found the boys awaiting him anxiously, and Hal Martin, his first lieutenant, cried:

"We are glad to see you back, Jack. What news have you?"

"The best of news," cried Jack with smiling face.

"Then we are to have a campaign?"

"One such as will suit all, I feel sure. We have a special commission to capture a proposed telegraph line ten miles south of here. We are likely to have lively times with guerrillas and other detached troops."

At this those of the Blues present indulged in a loud whoop. It brought all of the others out of their tents.

"When are we to start, Captain Clark?" asked Corporal Tom Peters.

"At once," replied the boy captain. "Get everything ready."

The Blues at once hastened to break camp. Other companies bivouacked along the creek regarded them with envy.

For, to be given a special commission by General Grant was a favor not to be lightly regarded.

The Blues soon had struck their tents, and folding up their blankets made ready for the start. Several wagons followed in their rear drawn by mules. These carried their camp equipage.

Besides this, the Blues had obtained possession of a six-pounder field piece.

This they hauled behind them. Thus they set out on the march for Carew's plantation.

The country in this part of Tennessee is made up largely of bayous and bottom lands. There had been much rain, but cold weather setting in had frozen the ground somewhat. So that progress was not altogether bad.

The Blues were in the highest of spirits and marched away as if upon a pleasure jaunt instead of the grim work of war.

They had crossed the Panther Creek and were reaching higher ground when a courier came up with a mail bag over his shoulder.

"Hello!" he cried. "Is this Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues?"

"It is," replied Jack.

"Mail for you and the members of your company."

The bag was taken possession of by Corporal Tom Peters.

The letters were quickly assorted as the Blues marched on and letters were passed around, which were read while the boys were marching.

Jack Clark received quite a number. Among them was one dated at Fairdale, New York. He kissed it as he broke the seal, for he knew it was from his mother.

He read the loving lines tenderly and finally paused at a paragraph which caused a bit of color to come into his cheeks. Thus it read:

"Jack, I have constant news of the brave work of your chum Will Prentiss, who is captain of the Virginia Grays. What a pity that so noble a youth should be allied with the cause of the South. But I presume he thinks he is fighting for the right. Apropos of this I must mention the fact that Nellie Prentiss, whom you know has played the part of a Confederate girl spy, was arrested by our soldiers in Alexandria, but somehow contrived to escape. It is said that she will shortly go West on spy service.

"Your sister Bessie is in Arlington and hopes to be with your army ere this. If you see Bessie tell her that I will write her at Nashville. She is to have charge of a corps of nurses for the Sanitary Commission."

Jack Clark felt a deep thrill. He noted with much pleasure that his sister Bessie was to be near him.

But when he read the name of the girl spy, Nellie Prentiss, he sighed deeply.

Will Prentiss, the son of a Southern man of wealth, had taken up the cause of the Confederacy. He and Jack had been school chums.

The war had separated them, even to the breaking of the ties of friendship. It was only one of many such incidents.

But Nellie Prentiss, the beautiful high-bred Southern girl, had been his sweetheart. The war was a deep gulf between them, which only the prospect of peace could hope to bridge.

Jack folded the letter and placed it in his pocket.

Then he strode on at the head of his men. He was not a victim of foolish sentiment, but he felt that it would indeed seem good to see his sister at that moment.

If she should come to the Western Army as a nurse he would seek the first opportunity to find her.

The Blues marched on. The miles passed and it was toward the close of day when they came out upon a little rise of ground, and Corporal Tom Peters cried:

"There you are, Captain Clark. There is the plantation."

This was seen to be true.

In a fertile little valley through which flowed a creek were the buildings of the plantation or stock farm of Colonel Carew. They were of a thrifty sort and indicated the prosperity of the owner.

But a glance showed a surprising state of affairs at the farm.

At the head of the long lane shaded with Lombardy poplars was a cannon. Before the house was another, and at the rear lawn was a third.

Armed men patrolled up and down before the house. It could be seen that they were of the Southern type, wearing jeans and wide-brimmed hats. They carried rifles of the old Kentucky pattern.

Jack Clark paused and studied the place through his glass.

It was easy for him to recognize several facts. One was

that the place had a powerful guard of thirty desperate fighting men. It would mean a heavy loss of life to attack them, for they would fight to the death.

The young captain of the Blues was courageous to the last degree. Yet he was not impolitic.

At this moment he saw a stir among the defenders of the place and recognized the fact that his presence was discovered.

"They can see us, captain," cried Hal Martin as he came up.

"So I perceive," said Jack quietly. "We are in plain view."

"What shall we do?"

"Send a man down with a white flag. Let us interview them."

Hal at once obeyed orders. One of the Blues carrying a white flag descended to the head of the poplar-bordered lane.

The flag of truce was recognized and one of the Confederates came out in answer to it.

Jack Clark had instructed the truce-bearer, who requested that the leader of the Confederates come out and consult with Captain Clark.

This request seemed evidently reasonable to the Confederates, for one of their number joined the truce-bearer in the lane.

Jack went down to meet him. It was easy to see that the Confederate leader was a man of superior intelligence.

"I am pleased to meet you, sir," said Jack affably. "I am Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues, and I have come to accept your unconditional surrender."

CHAPTER II.

THE OUTPOST ESTABLISHED.

The Confederate leader's face flushed. For a moment there was an angry light in his eyes.

But he restrained his temper and replied haughtily:

"You may spare yourself the trouble. We do not surrender!"

"I outnumber you five to one."

"That does not awe us. We have artillery and intrenchments. If you come within range we'll blow you into perdition."

"How does it happen that you are here?" asked Jack.

"Simple enough. Colonel Carew is a man of wealth. He owns blooded horses. The country is full of Yankee raiders like you. He proposes to defend his property."

"And that is what you are here for?"

"It is."

"Then you are not part of any heavy body of men? Of General Johnston's line?"

"No, sir. We are an independent company. We seek only to defend private interests. You can see we wear no uniforms. Still our sympathies are with the South."

"I can see," said Jack quietly. "Well now, let me tell you the situation we are in. We are ordered by General Grant to come down here and take possession of this plantation."

"Jerusha! You'll never do it."

"Easy. We are to make a Union outpost of this farm. Our men will be quartered here for a while. We will do no harm if we are not defied. In case of resistance we shall resort to the most extreme of measures."

The Confederate leader, who had given his name as Leander Bishop, frowned and at once replied:

"You'll never quarter your soldiers on this farm. We will burn every building first."

"Take time to reflect," said Jack calmly. "We can surround you and force you to surrender."

"Surround and be hanged!" cried Bishop. "We will never surrender."

"That is your answer?"

"Yes."

"I want to see Carew."

"I represent Carew. His answer is the same."

"Very well," said Jack quietly. "We shall move upon your intrenchments at once."

"Do so, and we'll give you a hot reception."

Bishop withdrew and Jack went back to his company. The boy captain was nonplussed.

He had no doubt of his ability to carry the works of the Confederates and capture the farmhouse.

But it must be at a heavy loss of life. Would the end justify the means? He believed not.

Yet, it was General Grant's order to capture Carew's place and quarter his company on the plantation.

He conferred with Hal and his lieutenant, who shook his head and said:

"I don't believe we ought to make a fight of it yet, Jack. If we drive them out we will gain but little."

"But our orders——"

"Pshaw! I don't believe General Grant had any idea that there would be such a state of affairs here. If he had he would have advised you to do just what we think best to do now."

"What?"

"Simply invest the plantation. Surround it and wait."

"You may be right, Hal."

"I feel so. I think it was simply General Grant's purpose to establish an outpost here. This we can do without any necessary sacrifice of life. We can look up the telegraph gang and make other expeditions as he directed."

"Very good!" agreed Jack. "Give orders accordingly. Surround the plantation and post picket guards in all directions."

At once this plan was adopted.

To make a complete line about the plantation with their small company was impossible for the Blues. But detachments of four or five were stationed at the various points of the compass to give a general warning in case an escape was attempted.

But now an unlooked for thing occurred. The field

pieces at the farm house began to speak and shot began to fly over the heads of the Blues.

Jack quickly decided to stop this.

The cannon they had was rifled and could throw a deadly explosive shell. Jack gave the order:

"Load the six-pounder. Train it on that gun at the head of the lane. See that you dismount it."

At once the little cannon was sighted. Tom Peters was an expert gunner. He carefully drew the sight.

Then the little piece spoke:

"Boom!"

There was a crash, a fearful upheaval of earth, and when the smoke had cleared away it was seen that the Confederate gun was dismounted.

The gunners were dead and others were fleeing for their lives. Firing at once ceased. There was a long silence.

"I guess they have had enough," said Jack. "We will let them alone for a while."

The Blues now went into camp.

Very shrewdly, and to deceive the defenders of the farmhouse, Jack caused a complete line of campfires to be built around the farmhouse.

On the ridges which surrounded the plantation these fires burned. Armed sentries paced up and down.

It was easy enough to assume that a force of a thousand men encompassed the plantation.

The effect of this upon Bishop and his men must needs be depressing.

The night hours passed slowly enough to the Blues in their bivouac.

The wagon train with their tents had not come up, so they were compelled to sleep in their blankets on the cold ground. But they had become well used to this sort of hardship since their Virginia campaign.

Jack and Hal lay side by side under a spreading oak.

"I say, Jack," said Hal in a reminiscent way, "do you recall those days on the Potomac when we were waiting for a chance to get into trouble?"

"Indeed I do!" replied Jack. "I'll never forget our experiences at Bull Run."

"That was an awful battle."

"It was for us. The Confederates seemed to enjoy it."

"They ought to. It seemed to be going their way. However, I'm glad we are out here with Grant, for I believe we are going to have some fighting before this Tennessee campaign is over."

"So do I."

Hal yawned and closed his eyes. In a few moments he was asleep.

A chill wind swept the ridges when the Blues answered reveille. They at once hastened to renew the campfires.

Down at the farmhouse nothing could be seen of the Confederate defenders. But a little after sunrise Corporal Peters came running up.

"Captain," he cried excitedly, "they have woke up at the farmhouse. There is another flag of truce."

Jack gave a start. He looked at Hal and smiled.

"Perhaps it is to be a bloodless victory," he said. "Let us go down and see."

So the boy captain and his lieutenant walked down to the entrance to the lane. Two men stood there.

One wore butternut jeans and carried a rifle. The other was dressed in a white cotton suit, with a wide-brimmed Panama hat, after the fashion of the planter. It was a cool outfit for so chilly a day, but he did not seem to heed the cold.

He saluted Jack and said:

"Are you Captain Clark?"

"I am," replied Jack.

"I am Colonel Carew. I own this farm. I am a non-combatant in this war and seek only to be left alone. What do you want here?"

Jack looked keenly at Carew.

"Do you mean that?"

"I do."

"You are a Confederate at heart, sir, and you know it."

This nettled Carew, who replied:

"When you are in Rome you must do as the Romans do. What is it to you? I have never lifted my sword in defence of either side. I want to be left alone to raise my horses and obey the laws of the land."

"Very well, sir!" replied Jack. "I can assure you I do not wish you ill. But this is a time of war. My government needs the help of every true man. I am ordered by General Grant to establish an outpost here and I must obey the order."

"On this farm?"

"Yes."

"I won't have it!" blustered Carew. "I tell you you can't trespass here. So that cowardly poltroon of a Grant sent you here, eh? Confound his pig-headed——"

"Stop!"

Jack's sword point was at the speaker's throat. Carew paused instinctively.

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"No man shall defame my commanding officer in that way. Say no more, or I'll run you through!"

"You coward! I am under the protection of the white flag."

"Nothing will protect you if you vilify General Grant. Now, sir, I demand that you surrender at once. If not, I will attack you and destroy your plantation and send you a prisoner to Washington."

Carew's face was purple. He choked, and for a moment was unable to reply. A shadow of fear came over his face.

"You have the advantage of me," he gritted. "I suppose I'll have to swallow it. I demand that my house shall not be invaded."

"Your house shall not be entered unless it becomes necessary in case we are attacked," said Jack. "I promise you that."

"My niece, Miss Ward, is in great fear," whimpered Carew. "You will guarantee her protection?"

"All females are safe," replied Jack. "The Blues are

young men of high character. There need be no apprehension."

Carew hesitated a moment.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I decided to surrender last night. But Leander Bishop, who is leader of the men you saw here, got angry and skipped out——"

"What?" cried Jack in amazement. "He made his escape?"

"He did!"

"How many of his men went with him?"

"All but three or four."

This was a matter of deep amazement to Jack Clark. That Bishop and his men could have slipped through their lines seemed incredible.

Moreover, it was the cause of some apprehension. Bishop could no doubt carry word to the Confederate commander and perhaps bring a heavy force to drive the newly established outpost back.

Jack turned to Hal and said:

"Go back and send a detachment down here to take charge of this place. We will move our camp down here at once."

"All right, captain!"

Hal hurried away and Jack now walked up the lane with Carew, who seemed more affable.

"Hang it. They told me you Yankees were a lot of pirates and would burn my house," he said. "Your men look like educated men."

"They are such!" replied Jack with spirit. "The South may boast of its chivalry, but the North can lay claim to culture and education."

Carew looked curiously at Jack.

"I was North once," he said. "I went up into Ohio after a runaway nigger. I had a hard time gittin' my property. Everybody tried to block me."

"Negroes are not regarded as property in the North," said Jack.

"You Yankees are a curious lot. What else is the nigger good for?"

But Jack would not argue the slavery question and changed the subject.

"You have a fine farm here," he said.

"You bet I have."

"Is it all under cultivation?"

"Eh? Not exactly! I raise hay and grain for my stock. I have one of the finest string of blooded horses in the country. Come out to the paddocks and I'll show you."

Jack accompanied the horse-breeder, for he was seemingly more such than a planter. They reached the paddock and Carew had a negro lad lead out several of his colts.

"They are valuable horseflesh," he said. "You cannot wonder that I am anxious to protect them from your General Grant, who might send down here and requisition them at any moment."

"Really, I do not blame you," admitted Jack. "I'll promise you, though, that they shall not be taken, nor no harm done your place so long as you treat us fairly and well."

Carew turned square about.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

"I do."

"Give us your hand."

They gripped hands. The planter's face shone with pleasure.

"You and your company are welcome here under those conditions," he said. "And Jim Carew keeps his word."

"Very good," said Jack. "We will not disturb you or your family, and we shall occupy only enough ground for camp purposes."

"Then you are welcome," cried Carew. "And I'm mighty glad Bishop has taken his leave. He annoyed my niece with his proposals of marriage and I was ready to kick him out anyway. You're welcome to my plantation."

CHAPTER III.

DESTROYING THE RAILROAD.

Jack Clark bade adieu to Carew and went out to meet the first detachment sent down by Hal to take charge of the plantation campground.

An hour later the entire company was encamped a few rods from the house.

The white tents were put up and the Blues made preparations for permanent headquarters and camp. The outpost at Carew's was established.

The morning hours were passed thus. It was just after noon when Carew came excitedly out to the campground.

In his hand he held a note. He sought out Jack and cried:

"Read this, Captain Clark. It will explain itself."

Jack took the note. It was a rough scrawl and read as follows:

"To Jim Carew:

"You have surrendered to the Yanks and you have made a mistake. You shall learn what it means to be a traitor when you harbor and consort with the foes of the Confederacy. I am on my way to General Johnston, and when I report to him just how matters are he will send sufficient force to wipe out your Yankee allies, and there will be twenty feet of rope and a noose for you. Then perhaps your pretty niece will not turn up her nose at an honest man. Yours
LEANDER BISHOP."

Jack returned the letter calmly to the planter. Carew's face was very dark.

"What do you think of that?" he asked. "What would you do in the matter?"

"Say nothing and wait," said Jack. "This fellow is a bluff. Johnston is too busy preparing for the defence of Donelson to bother with a small outpost like this."

"If I ever meet Bishop again I'll teach him a lesson," gritted Carew.

"I think you need have little to fear from him," said Jack. "I think I would forget him. By the way, Mr. Carew, do you know anything of a proposed line of telegraph below here?"

Carew's face was a study.

"I am a citizen of the Confederate States, and as such I must be loyal," he said. "I hope you will not embarrass me with such questions."

Jack nodded and smiled.

"That's all right, Mr. Carew. I will respect your wish. If Bishop comes this way and falls into my hands I will hang him for a bushwhacker."

Just then Corporal Tom Peters came hurriedly into the camp.

"Captain Clark," he said, "the pickets report a dispatch bearer from General Grant."

"Pass him through the lines," said Jack.

A few moments later an orderly came dashing into the camp. His horse was white with foam.

"Orders for Captain Clark," he said as he flung himself out of the saddle. Jack hurriedly read the order.

"Headquarters Army of the Tennessee,

"Fort Henry, February 10th, 1862.

"To Captain Jack Clark:

"Immediately upon receipt of this order you will march south four miles to White Spring and cut a line of telegraph which you will find there. Also break the line of railway, and if possible capture any stores or Confederates you may find there.

"(Signed) U. S. GRANT, General Commanding."

Jack placed the order in his pocket and said to the orderly:

"Report to General Grant that his orders will be obeyed."

The orderly saluted and galloped away. Jack turned to Hal and said:

"Order out fifty men at once. They must be in good marching order."

"All right, sir."

Carew, who had been a listener, now stepped forward eagerly:

"Captain Clark, I will tell you something. It will be well for you to proceed with care. Our men are strong at White Spring."

"I thank you, Carew," replied Jack. "But that will not prevent our going thither, for we have orders to do so."

"It might be warning enough to influence you to use care."

"Which I will do, and I thank you," replied Jack as he shook hands warmly with the planter, who seemed strangely in sympathy with the Blues.

In less time than it takes to tell it Hal Martin had the detachment of fifty men in line and ready to march.

Jack saw that all was ready and placed himself at their head, and thus they marched away.

The march of four miles was not a difficult one. But as

they approached White Spring Jack caused his men to deploy in a skirmish line and advance carefully.

This was a fortunate thing, for suddenly they came in sight of a camp of several hundred Confederates close by the railroad track.

These men were not in uniform and had all the appearance of guerrillas. As Jack studied them through a glass he made up his mind what they were.

It did not seem feasible to attack them, so Jack decided to pass by them. Just beyond was the railroad and the line of telegraph which he was to cut.

The Blues marched through a ravine and came to a trestle over which the railroad passed.

They had barely reached this point when the whistle of a train was heard. This dashed into sight around a curve.

On a flat car were a score of Confederate soldiers. Other cars behind seemed to be loaded with supplies.

Jack was just too late to hold up the train, and it thundered by. He gave an exclamation of disgust.

"They got away from us," said Hal.

"Yes," agreed the boy captain. "And it's too bad, for I am sure they are bound for Nashville."

"For Nashville," exclaimed Hal. "Perhaps more will come along."

But Jack shook his head, as much as to say that it was too late. He, however, said:

"Boys, rip up the track. Don't leave a rail spiked down."

The men needed no incentive. They instantly made a rush for the track.

Seizing hold of the ties they lifted hard and up came the track. It was thrown aside, bent and ruined. A fire was built under the ties and the rails, heated white hot, were twisted and bent.

Then they cut the telegraph wires and chopped down the poles. In a short while the work of destruction was done.

But Jack Clark knew that this was not all that was required of him.

General Grant's orders spoke of a special line of telegraph that was being laid.

This probably cut across the country somewhere beyond and was in the hands of the cavalry.

To find and destroy it was now the boy captain's purpose.

But, even while the Blues were about to leave the railroad, one of the scouts came up hurriedly.

"We are about to be attacked, Captain Clark," he said.

"I would advise you to prepare for it at once."

"From what quarter?" asked Jack.

"The enemy are just on the other side of that wood. They are several hundred strong."

"Indeed! Are they regular troops?"

"I think not, sir."

Jack made up his mind at once who they were. He decided that they were the body of irregular troops or guerrillas they had seen a short time before.

They were coming to attack the Blues and Jack Clark knew well what this meant.

If they outnumbered him four or five to one it was his province to avoid an open battle with them.

Jack quickly made up his mind what to do.

He ordered his men to fall back down the railroad track.

A short distance below, perhaps half a mile, was a small flag station. The Blues started for this.

When they drew near Jack saw a man in jeans and long boots standing on the platform.

The boy captain at once approached him. The man, who seemed a native, did not move, but coolly smoking a cheroot waited for the Blues to arrive.

"How do you do?" said Jack by way of salutation as he came up.

"Howdy!" said the fellow in a nonchalant way. "What are you Yanks doing here?"

"We have just pulled up a few railroad ties," replied Jack. "Do you belong around here?"

"Yes, I reckon," replied the fellow. "So ye pulled up ther rails, eh? Do ye know what thet means fer you?"

There was a sinister significance in the fellow's tone, which at once attracted Jack. He gave him a closer look.

"Let me see?" he said quietly. "You are a native of this place, I take it?"

"I reckon I am."

"You're a good Confederate?"

"I ain't sayin'. You Yanks might hang a fellow. But I'm a Southerner, you bet."

"Good! Tell me what will happen to me for pulling up the ties?"

"Ye'll hang for it."

"Hang for it?"

"Yas!"

"You speak with a good deal of confidence. How do you know that I will hang for it? Who will hang me?"

"General Johnston! What's a handful of measly bluebacks like you to a thousand or more of our boys in gray? Why, you'll be wiped off the map in another day."

There was a peculiar strange significance in the fellow's words that at once claimed Jack's interest. He felt that he knew something of importance. What this was he was determined to know.

"Lieutenant Martin," said Jack affecting sternness, "here is a cowardly dog of a bushwhacker. He is also in sympathy with the Confederacy. Seize him and hang him up to the nearest tree!"

In an instant a couple of the Blues had their bayonets at the outspoken Southerner's breast.

But, instead of wilting and showing fear, as Jack had anticipated, the fellow was cool and unconcerned, and drawing back sent a stream of tobacco juice into the eye of the nearest private soldier.

For this the others would have run him through, but Jack's ringing voice checked them. He now advanced and faced the prisoner.

"Who are you?" he demanded sternly.

"I'm Jed Spruceby, an' thar ain't no stain on my reputation," replied the fellow with an air of pride. "I'm a gentleman, an' if you want to hang me you kin do so. Hang away an' be hanged. But I'll tell ye one thing. If ye hang me, ye'll all be hanged in another twenty-four hours."

"Look here, Spruceby, or whatever your name is," said Jack. "How can you make that boast? Are we surrounded?"

"Surrounded?" exclaimed Spruceby. He pulled at the little tuft on his chin. "I should say you was. Grimsby's men are over that ridge. Another detachment is over thar on ther Nashville road. The railroad below is held by a regiment of our troops. I don't see how you ever got down into this part of Tennessee and lived to tell of it."

This was most astonishing news to Jack and Hal.

If it was true, they were indeed in a critical situation. But they could not accept the word of Jed Spruceby as final.

However, Jack asked:

"The Confederates must be thick hereabouts?"

"Wall, you'll think so afore you git out of here," said Spruceby. "Hangin' me won't help ye."

"It might be giving you your deserts, though. Now, Spruceby, if there are so many Confederates about here, how does it happen that we see so few of them?"

"Jest a bit of chance, that's all. Come down from Fort Henry, didn't ye? Drove Leander Bishop out of Carew's, didn't ye? Goin' to make an outpost thar, are ye? Ye kin see that I am onto ye, and ye kin bet that ye've walked right into a trap. Ye'll never git back to Fort Henry an' I kin tell ye that."

Jack was astounded.

He stared at the fellow in amazement. Then he looked at Hal, who was equally surprised.

"See here, Spruceby," said Hal quietly, "how does it happen you know so much? Where did you get your information?"

"By keeping my ears open," chuckled the fellow. "Do ye think I'm a fool?"

"Oh, no," said Jack warily. "I believe you are a sharp fellow. In fact, so sharp that I believe we had better hang on to you."

"Do as ye please," said Spruceby indifferently. "If ye make a prisoner of me, it won't be for long."

"Don't flatter yourself," said Jack. "We shall hang onto you, for I believe you are a Confederate spy."

"That's what he is, Jack," cried Hal. "Hold him and let's go through his pockets."

Two of the Blues held Spruceby and Hal examined the fellow's pockets. The result was that a map of Fort Donelson was produced, also a written passport signed by General Johnston.

Jack was convinced that Spruceby was a spy.

He resolved to keep him in custody. It puzzled him, though, that the fellow should be so cool and unconcerned.

Spruceby was taken in charge by the Blues. In spite of all, Jack felt a trifle nervous over the statements made by Spruceby regarding the proximity of the foe.

It struck Jack as quite possible that the fellow had told the truth.

But the Blues were out to carry their project through. It was not their way to turn back.

So Jack, after ransacking the little flag station, ordered

the advance. The Blues marched down the track for a ways when suddenly the distant whistle of a train was heard.

In an instant the boy captain ordered his men into cover in the bushes beside the track.

The locomotive swung into view around a curve. It required but a glance for the engineer to see that the track was torn up ahead of him.

In an instant he whistled for down brakes. The train came quickly to a stop.

Then the Blues saw that it was a freight, and as the locomotive flew the Confederate flag it was easy to assume that the train carried supplies.

This was enough for Jack and he instantly gave the word to charge.

The Blues sprung forward, and in a moment were swarming into the cab and had made a prisoner of the engineer and also of his mate.

The train was now in the hands of the Union soldiers.

Jack knew well the importance of the capture. A few questions of the engineer divulged the fact that the train was en route for Nashville and carried supplies for Johnston's army.

In a moment Jack adopted what was the logical plan of a military commander. He knew that in order to prevent the supplies falling into the hands of the Confederates they must be destroyed.

So he gave the order to break open the cars and haul out the contents. This was done by the Blues.

Car after car was emptied and the stuff heaped upon the ground beside the track.

There were supplies of all kinds, such as uniforms, guns, food and even gunpowder. The latter Jack caused to be removed at some distance and thrown into a creek.

Jed Spruceby, the prisoner, watched the scene with a sardonic smile upon his face. It was as if he knew well that a reprisal would ensue.

The carloads of supplies were heaped up and then set on fire.

While the pile made a huge bonfire the Blues quickly uncoupled some of the cars and ran them upon a siding.

There were a number of the boys who could run a locomotive. One of these took his place at the lever.

Jack had thought of running the engine down the track a ways and of letting it jump the track.

But just as this was about to be executed a startling thing happened.

Jed Spruceby gave a yell. There was a distant cracking of muskets and balls flew over the heads. It required but a glance for Jack to take in the situation.

Over a nearby ridge of land came a line of armed men.

They did not wear the Confederate gray. They were, as Spruceby had said, a detachment of Grimsby's men.

There was a legion of them, enough to envelop the Blues and sweep them from the earth.

At the same moment from the opposite side of the track there appeared another body of the foe.

They were coming down from two sides. Spruceby gave an exultant yell.

"What did I tell ye? They'll wipe ye out root and branch! Hooray for the Confederacy! Hooray fer Jeff Davis."

It seemed as if Spruceby's prophecy had come true.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REAR ATTACK.

Jack Clark's cool nerve now stood him in good stead.

He saw that the situation was critical; that annihilation or capture was imminent, and he acted quickly.

"Open the throttle!" he shouted to the boy in the locomotive cab. "Get aboard the cars, Blues, quick!"

The order went up like a trumpet call. The Blues were ready and eager to obey.

They sprung into the freight cars like monkeys. The bullets were whistling all about them.

The Confederates saw the purpose of the Blues and acted quickly.

They fired volley after volley into the cars. Only Providence prevented a terrible loss of life.

"Give it to 'em, boys!" shouted Hal.

The little detachment of Blues now proceeded to return the fire which was showered upon them. So effective was this that the gray line staggered.

But now the train began to move and was every moment getting headway.

One of the Confederates reached a point on the track just below and tried to drag a steel rail across the track.

But one of the Blues raised his musket and took quick aim.

Crack!

The Confederate soldier threw up his arms and fell. In another moment the train had passed that spot.

Back down the track ran the train in the direction from which it had come. But before two miles had been covered Jack cried:

"Stop her, Jim! Pull up at once!"

At once the young engineer brought the train to a stop. Jack sprung down and gave an order to the Blues to follow.

The little detachment formed quickly, and Jack walking before them spoke:

"Comrades, we are in a dangerous position. Enemies are upon all sides of us. But we shall pull out all right, if we keep up our nerve. We are at present unable to return to Fort Henry. We shall rejoin our company at Carew's."

The Blues cheered and then Jack gave the order to derail the train.

This was done by pulling up several of the rails. The train was then run off into the ditch.

Leaving the wreck behind them, the boys set out on their return march to Carew's. On the whole their expedition had been a success.

Spruceby had suddenly grown sober. His lean face acquired a distinct pallor.

Evidently what he had been sure would happen had not done so. He had been sure that the Blues would easily become prisoners.

But it now looked as if they would make good their escape and get safely back to Carew's.

In that case Spruceby was likely to remain a prisoner and be dealt with as a spy.

This was not to him a pleasant reflection. He had rather have his freedom. It was certain that he now regretted his plan of action.

Leaving the railroad track, Jack took to the highway.

He knew that it would be foolhardy to attempt to find the secret line of telegraph just now.

It would be advisable to wait a reasonable time for another and more suitable opportunity. At least until the country was more clear of foes.

At present it was more advisable and indeed necessary to at once get back to Carew's.

So the Blues marched on down the highway. Four miles is not a great distance to march. By the best of luck they met none of the foe.

Soon Carew's farm came in sight. There were visible the farm buildings and a number of the Blues were in the yard.

The boys cheered when they saw their camp safe below them. They would have at once gone down to rejoin their comrades had not Jack restrained them.

"Not yet," he whispered. "Wait! Do you see that yonder?"

All eyes saw a line of men in gray debouching from a pass. On one side was the smiling valley and scenery. On the other a line of armed men, with glittering bayonets.

In a few moments that line was augmented by others. The region fairly swarmed with the foe. They were coming down to capture the farm. Jack took in the whole situation at a glance.

Hal Martin gasped:

"Great Cæsar! They mean to wipe us out. They are ten to one!"

"That is right," said Jack calmly. "The odds are very great."

"They will overwhelm us, Jack. I wonder if Peters knows they are coming. Oh, see that?"

A line of flame leaped from the ridge. The distant crash of the volley could be heard.

The Confederates had opened fire. The Blues at the farmhouse were seen to be hurrying into their intrenchments.

It was plain that the Confederates meant to charge. There was no skirmish and no preliminary movement.

Jack watched the scene for some moments. Then he turned to see Spruceby looking at him.

The spy's face wore an expression of keen exultation. It was plain that he believed the end was near for the Blues.

"You see," he said in an exultant tone. "Those are

Grimsby's men. Bishop is leading them. He means to wipe you off the earth."

"Does he?" said Jack with a laugh. "Well, he'll have a hot time."

"Pooh!" exclaimed the spy. "What kin you do to prevent? He's got ten men to yer one."

"All right," said Jack coolly. "Just keep your eyes open, my boy, and I'll show you how to beat that trick."

Hal now came up excitedly.

"Ought we not to go to the help of our boys?" he asked. "Aren't we wasting time here?"

"Hal," said Jack quietly, "order the men to fall back into that growth of sycamore."

The young lieutenant stared.

Words of remonstrance were on his lips. But he restrained them. He knew that Jack Clark's commands were not to be questioned.

So he gave the orders. The little detachment of Blues fell back.

Meanwhile the Confederates were coming down to attack the defenders of the outpost. They came on the double quick.

Jack watched the scene a moment. He had full confidence in Peters and in his second lieutenant. If the attacking foe were repulsed on that first charge then there would be a chance.

Suddenly from the Blues' intrenchments there leaped a line of fire. Another and another volley ensued.

The attacking line wavered, fell back a little and then broke. They went back in confusion.

The charge had been broken, the enemy was repulsed. They went back to form on the ridge.

Jack now turned to his men.

"Boys," he cried, "we will beat them. Follow me!"

Along the ridges and in the cover of the trees the little detachment of Blues marched at double quick. Jack led them, sword in hand.

On they went until they finally crossed bottom land and came out upon the opposite side of the valley.

This was in the rear of the Confederate troops. Jack's plan was a daring one. For its success he counted much upon the demoralizing effect of a rear attack.

It is well known that a handful of troops coming upon the rear of a large army will sometimes throw it into confusion and enable a much smaller force to encompass its defeat.

So Jack had this in mind. It was certainly a daring move, but he was not the one to shrink from danger.

The Confederates were getting ready for the second attack upon the outpost at Carew's.

Jack's boys crept up closely in the rear of the foe. In the confusion of the engagement they had neglected to post pickets in their rear.

So the Blues were enabled to creep up very close.

The Confederates were forming for the second charge. Hal Martin, eager and excited, exclaimed:

"Now is our time, Jack. Shall we fire?"

"Not yet."

"But they will soon be gone. They are almost ready to charge."

"Let them charge first," said Jack.

"What?" exclaimed Hal in amazement. "Do you mean that? They may carry the intrenchments this time."

"Let them do it if they can," said the boy captain coolly. "It is while they are making the charge and are in open formation that our attack will be more demoralizing."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

So the detachment of Blues was held in check. Suddenly Grimsby's men moved forward for the second attack.

Jack could see Leander Bishop plainly as he walked beside Grimsby. The Confederate soldiers moved forward.

They had got half way down the hill when Jack gave the word:

"Ready, Blues! Fire!"

In an instant a well-directed volley was poured into the rear of the Confederate column. Jack Clark, sword in hand, sprung into the open.

"At them, Blues!" he cried. "Scatter them like chaff! Charge!"

The astonished Confederates, looking back, saw blue uniforms all along the ridge. There might be fifty or there might be five thousand, for all they knew.

It was enough that they were attacked in the rear.

No soldier can stand up and fight a foe in front, knowing that there is one in his rear.

So the Confederate irregular troops were not to be blamed for breaking up and rushing right and left.

In a few minutes they were in a complete rout. All the exhortations of Bishop and Grimsby were of no avail.

The Blues poured volley after volley into their flying ranks. A handful of Union soldiers had routed a regiment of the foe.

But it was not to be expected that this sort of a victory could be permanent.

Jack was not reckless, and he knew that the proper move for him was to rejoin his comrades at the farm as quickly as possible.

So he called the boys back, and they marched rapidly down the slope and into the lane. Second Lieutenant Walton and the others saw them coming and cheered wildly.

In a few moments they were at the other end of the lane. The Blues rushed out of their rifle pits to welcome them.

It was a happy reunion.

Walton and Peters had feared that some serious harm had come to Jack and his detachment. That they were now glad to see him goes without saying.

"We thought you had walked into a trap," cried the genial corporal. "You can be sure we were glad when we saw you coming."

"I have no doubt," said Jack. "And I can tell you I was glad when I saw you repulse those fellows."

"If they had got among us it would have been all up with us."

"Indeed it would!"

"Well, Captain Clark," exclaimed the planter Carew, who

now advanced with beaming face, "I congratulate you upon your victory."

"Congratulations from a Confederate sympathizer are as welcome as unexpected," said Jack.

"Confederate sympathizer is all right," said Carew, "but those fellows are but little better than bushwhackers. My fortunes are safer in your hands than theirs. But I want to see you upon a matter of importance, Captain Clark."

CHAPTER V.

HEMMED IN.

Jack looked at Carew in surprise. He saw that the planter was in earnest.

"I am at your service, Mr. Carew," he said. "What can it be?"

"I will ask you to come to the house with me."

"With pleasure."

Thus far Jack had not set foot inside Carew's house. He had met no other member of his household.

He had heard him speak of his niece and ward, Mabel Ward. But he had not been interested further.

But now, as they stepped upon the porch, a young girl of remarkable presence arose to meet them.

It could not be said that Mabel Ward was in the strictest sense of the term a beauty. But she was charming beyond compare both in person and manner.

She met the young captain, and for a moment they faced each other. In that moment each experienced a strange exalted sensation.

Jack's face flushed a trifle and her cheeks reddened. Her eyes fell before his gaze. Then Jack recovered himself.

"My niece, Miss Ward," said Carew in a perfunctory way, "Captain Clark, Mabel. We are dependent upon him at present for the safe guardianship of our home here."

"I am glad to meet Captain Clark," replied the young girl in a firm tone. "He is certainly very kind, and an illustration of the fact that all the chivalry in this country is not to be found in the South."

"You are generous, Miss Ward," replied Jack. "I might reciprocate and say that all the fairest women are not to be found in the North."

Carew laughed heartily.

"That is enough. Exchange no more French compliments," he cried. "Let us come down to practical matters. I know Captain Clark is a deuced handsome man, but you, Mabel, have suitors without number, and I have no doubt his heart is left behind him in the North."

"I think Miss Ward and myself must resent those assumptions on your part," said Jack. "I feel sure, however, we shall be friends, Miss Ward."

"It is my earnest wish," replied the young girl. "But as uncle seems impatient to get down to practical matters, I have no doubt he will impart to you the subject at present upon his mind."

"I am glad to seize the opportunity," said Carew as he drew a folded bit of note paper from his pocket. "Read that, Clark."

Jack took the paper. On it was written the following in a sort of scrawl:

"Dear Miss Mabel: At the present moment I am upon the Nashville road with a force of eight hundred men with which I shall surround your farm. We shall capture this company of Blues which has made outpost there. The result I will make known to you in a few words. Your most exalted and high-spirited uncle, who saw fit to order me out of doors, is hand-in-glove with the captain of this company of Blues. That makes of him a traitor. He shall be hung the moment we capture the farm unless—well, you know what! I am determined you shall be mine forever. Send your answer by this messenger and save your uncle's life."

"Yours ever, LEANDER BISHOP."

Jack held the note in his hand a moment and whistled softly.

"This is hardly an example of Southern chivalry," he said.

"The scoundrel!" gritted Carew. "He is not a Southerner. He came from some obscure part of the earth where nobody lives."

"Did you return an answer?"

"I answered it," said Carew. "I told him that if he was a man he would come down here and meet me on even terms. If I don't kill him he can have the privilege of killing me."

"Oh, uncle," cried Mabel with alarm. "You shall fight no duel."

"Don't be afraid," retorted Carew. "He is too great a coward to take the challenge."

"Well, I believe you," cried Jack. "But some one ought to interview the scoundrel. However, we gave him quite a setback just now."

"Hurrah! That is right!" cried Carew. Then his face grew serious:

"But can we hold it?"

"We will hold it," said Jack determinedly. "General Grant knew what he was doing when he sent us down here. He will not leave us here to be destroyed. We shall expect reinforcements if we are attacked."

"In any event," said Carew, "I must defend my niece. Now I would like your advice. What had we better do?"

Jack looked at the planter a moment in a thoughtful way. Finally he said:

"There is likely to be some hot fighting here, Carew."

"Well, I believe you."

"We are not infallible. We may be captured or killed. The post may be wiped out. In that case the position of your niece would be a hard one."

"I have considered that. But what can we do?"

"I advise you to send her away. I will furnish a strong guard. She would be safe in Fort Henry——"

"Among the Yankees——"

"Yes, perfectly safe," replied Jack with dignity. "I am a Yankee myself and there are many better than I at Fort Henry. I will write General Grant about her."

"But—she can go to Nashville among our own people, and——"

"Wait, uncle," said the young girl. "I can see the force of Captain Clark's reasoning, and I believe he is right. I would be much safer from molestation by Bishop in the Union lines."

Carew contracted his brows.

"Hang me, but I am not sure but that I am a traitor," he said. "I am certainly making friends with the foe. If it were not for the war——"

"Oh," cried Jack with sudden feeling, "you have struck the keynote, Carew. If it were not for the war we would be warm friends. And what is the war to you or me or thousands of others? It is the work of demagogues and political tricksters who have distorted facts and inflamed the minds of all the North and South. It is all wrong. The war is all wrong."

There was silence for some moments. The tall Southerner suddenly turned and held out his hand.

"Shake on that, Clark! If all the men in the North were like you we would be as brothers."

"Not so," replied Jack. "If all the square upright men North and South could get together and have a fair talk as you and I are doing, there would soon be peace."

"That is true," cried Mabel Ward with spirit. "Oh, if it could only come to pass."

"Let us have good cheer," said Carew. "It may be that all will come out right in the end. But to return to the subject we were discussing, you think Mabel ought to leave here, Captain Clark?"

"I do," replied Jack. "I will furnish a strong guard and she shall be sent to Fort Henry."

"For this we must acknowledge a great debt."

"There is no obligation of the slightest sort. I am altogether at the young woman's service, which I deem an honor."

Jack bowed and Mabel blushed in her prettiest way. Then the young captain, accompanied by Carew, went out.

Once outside, Carew said:

"To tell you the truth, Clark, I am much worried over this matter. I fear that Bishop has caused this place to be surrounded. If he has done so, you are hemmed in!"

Jack gave a start.

"Look here, Carew," he said. "I have been considering that same thing. Have you not a good stock of supplies on your farm?"

"I have."

"That is good. We may have to purchase largely of you——"

"Purchase? I should say not! It is all at your disposal in case of a siege. But the defenses——"

"They are quite good," said Jack. "I think we could hold an enemy at bay here for a good while. As I said before, General Grant is expected to send reinforcements."

"You think he will do so?"

"I know it."

"Very well," said Carew with a deep breath. "I am ready to aid you in any way I can against Bishop. When

you deem it advisable Mabel will be ready to go to Fort Henry."

"There is no time to lose."

"So I fancy."

"Let her be ready in an hour. I shall select a guard for her, and——"

Jack did not finish. At that moment Hal Martin came hurriedly up.

"Captain," he said, "I have to report that the prisoner Spruceby has escaped."

Jack gave a violent start.

"Spruceby, the spy?" he exclaimed. "That will not do. How did it happen? Who is at fault?"

"That I do not know, sir. He was placed in the cellar of the stable and a guard placed at the door. He has disappeared and cannot be found."

Jack was astonished. What was more, he was angry.

"Some one shall pay for such carelessness," he cried. "Take me to the place!"

Accompanied by Carew, Jack followed Hal to the stable. The cellar in which the prisoner had been confined was a low-ceiled chamber, with rock walls and cemented floor.

There was no visible chance for the prisoner to escape.

But that he had done so was certain. He was not in the place.

Jack questioned the guard closely, but he could get no clew.

Much chagrined, he left the place. But as he emerged Dick Walton came up and said:

"Captain Clark, scouts have returned and say that the road to Fort Henry is held by Confederates."

Jack gave a sharp exclamation. For a moment he was silent. Then he turned to Carew and said:

"You hear that?"

"I am not surprised."

"We are hemmed in."

"Yes, it looks dubious. I am sorry, Captain Clark, but unless General Grant sends you reinforcements you will be in a bad box."

"General Grant will send us aid," said Jack confidently. "I know him too well. Have no fear. We shall pull out in the end."

"I hope so."

But at that moment, as if all things were bound to come at once, Tom Peters came rushing up.

"A scout has just made his way in," he cried. "He says that Grant's whole army is moving upon Fort Donelson."

Hal Martin looked at Jack with white face.

"In that case," he said, "he will spare no reinforcements for us. Every man will be needed for the advance. We are hemmed in by the foe, and we must fight it out desperately or die like rats in a hole!"

CHAPTER VI.

A HARD FIGHT.

Jack Clark's face grew hard in its lines and his eyes glittered.

"All right," he said. "We will fight it out. But if we die it will be under the old flag with our faces to the foe and our hearts turned to God."

Hal Martin removed his cap.

"Amen to that sentiment," he cried. "We will die hard!"

Carew nodded and said:

"If all the Yankees are like you, I don't wonder we can't whip them."

Grimsby's men had retired beyond the ridge after their repulse. They did not see fit to renew the attack.

Jack now called Hal and Walton, with Peters and one or two others, into his tent for a consultation.

The position was carefully discussed and its possibilities gone over. It was known that desperate measures for defence must be taken.

If it had been possible Jack would have ordered a change of position. Where they were it would have been comparatively easy for a foe to shell them out had they attacked with artillery.

To be sure, the Blues had their own small gun, and there were two or three captured from Bishop's men.

But these latter were of an obsolete pattern and therefore of little account.

"It's my opinion," said Tom Peters, "that we ought to try and send word to General Grant for reinforcements."

"That has already been done," said Jack. "I have sent Jim Sanford and he is clever at slipping by picket guards."

"You couldn't send a better man," agreed Hal. "But do you consider our intrenchments effective, Jack?"

"They are as effective as such can be made," replied the boy captain. "Of course, a bomb-proof earthworks would be better."

"That we have not the masonry to construct," declared the second lieutenant. "I think our best hold will be in keeping the foe at long range."

"I agree with you," declared Jack. "I shall scatter my men all about the outpost so that fire cannot be concentrated. In case of a charge you can fall in quick enough to repel it."

"Well," said Hal with a deep breath, "we have no one to blame but ourselves for this scrape. We might have remained at Fort Henry."

"I wouldn't exchange positions," said Jack. "The Fair-lale Blues do not shirk good fighting."

"Indeed they don't," said Hal. "But if the worst comes, I would like to die beside our captain."

"The same here," cried the others. Jack bowed in recognition of the compliment and replied:

"We will all die together. I am decided upon one point, and that is that there shall be no surrender."

"No surrender!"

The young officers cheered heartily. Then the meeting broke up. Outside the tent Jack met Carew.

The planter was pale and anxious.

"What about Mabel?" he asked in a low tone. "Is it going to be possible to get her out of here?"

Jack shook his head.

"We are hemmed in," he said. "I see no chance."

Carew bit his lip. His face took on a stern expression.

"Then I will die in her defence," he said grimly. "I do not intend to raise my hand against the Confederate flag, but I cannot see my ward sacrificed."

"In that you are perfectly right," said Jack. "You are in no sense a traitor to your cause."

"If all in our army were like Bishop I would abandon the cause," said Carew. "But there are good men and true in the Confederate army."

"There is no doubt of that. But there is an immediate question as to the safety of yourself and your family," said Jack. "That I will try and provide for during the fight, which is at hand."

"To be safe from the bullets I will send them into the cellar," said Carew. "There is a small underground passage which leads to other cellars. This is known only to myself and will afford a good hiding place in case the worst should come."

"I am glad to know that," said Jack. "I advise you to take every precaution."

"I thank you for the advice."

Just then one of the Blues came up hastily and said:

"Captain, the foe are coming to the attack."

Jack left Carew and at once hastened to the intrenchments. It was just dusk and the air was clear and cold.

Far across the ridge could be seen the advancing line of Confederates. The glitter of their bayonets was plain.

They were coming on at a rapid pace. It seemed as if they were double in numbers what they were in the previous attack.

Jack went up and down the intrenchments speaking words of cheer to the Blues.

But this was hardly necessary, for they were ready and courageous. They had the advantage of the attacking line in the protection of the trenches.

Nearer came the line of Confederates. The Blues waited silently. It was a moment of tense sort.

Jack walked up and down, saying:

"Hold your fire, boys. Wait for the word. Wait until they get well in range. Then give it to them."

The order was strictly obeyed. The Confederates were within two hundred yards when the order was given to fire.

Then the first volley bored a hole in their lines. The second shattered them still more and the third drove them back.

Their officers could be seen exhorting them, and the order was heard given: "Fix bayonets! Charge!"

A section of the gray line reached the intrenchments. This was the supreme moment for action.

Jack sprung up and shouted:

"Up, Blues! Give them the cold steel! Charge bayonets!"

Over the breast-works sprung the Blues like living tigers. They were upon the gray soldiers like a whirlwind.

There was a fierce hand-to-hand conflict.

But the Blues were compact, while the Confederates had been shattered by the enemy's fire.

So that they were cut down in small squads and were hurled back in confusion. Then came the order to retreat.

Cheers went up from the throats of the Blues. It was a well-earned victory.

The shattered gray regiment went back to the ridges, while the Blues rejoiced in the fact that they as a single company had repulsed ten times their number.

The ground was covered with dead and wounded. But only a few of the Blues had met with harm. Four had been killed and half a dozen wounded.

Jack gave orders to have the Confederate wounded cared for.

But just then a Confederate flag of truce arrived and permission was requested to remove the dead and wounded.

Of course, Jack granted it.

Carew came eagerly down to the intrenchments.

"Well, boys," he cried, "you drove them back, didn't you?"

"We did," said Jack. "If we can do that every time, all will be well."

"Is not that too much to hope for?"

"Oh, yes. If they once got into our trenches they might give us trouble."

"So I thought! At any rate we are safe for the moment. Did you see anything of Bishop?"

"I did not," replied Jack.

"Ah, what is this?"

Men had come down from the Confederate lines to carry away the dead and wounded. Suddenly a couple of officers bearing a white flag appeared.

"We want to see Captain Clark."

Word was sent to Jack and the two envoys were ushered into Jack's tent. He received them courteously.

"Captain Clark?" asked the spokesman.

"Yes," replied Jack, "and at your service."

"I am Lieutenant Small, of Colonel Grimsby's staff. Colonel Grimsby sends his compliments and asks you to at once surrender your command."

There was a moment of silence. Jack looked keenly at the other a moment and then said:

"Did Colonel Grimsby send you here with such a request as that?"

"He did sir."

"It is most unparalleled. I must give your colonel credit for most astounding cheek."

"Colonel Grimsby requested me to say that he can give you better terms now than later."

"Didn't we give Colonel Grimsby about all that he wanted this afternoon?"

"That was but a skirmish, sir. We shall attack in force

to-morrow. Escape, sir, is impossible for you. You are completely hemmed in. You are utterly at our mercy, and if you are wise you will surrender."

"The Fairdale Blues have sworn not to surrender," said Jack. "I am sorry, sir, but we cannot entertain your terms. Convey my compliments to Colonel Grimsby and tell him that he is the one who is hemmed in, for regiments sent by General Grant will soon invest his rear."

The effect upon Lieutenant Small was at once marked. His eyes flashed and he said:

"Oh, I see! So General Grant is to send reinforcements, eh? Well, we shall be prepared, rest assured!"

"Very good," said Jack. "You will need preparation. I would advise you to keep in light marching order, for you will have to move quickly."

"You are free with advice, captain."

"It is well meant, I assure you."

"You will pardon us if we neglect to accept it."

"Certainly, if you are willing to pay the cost," said Jack. It was plain that he was more than a match for the smooth-tongued lieutenant, who bit his lip and said:

"Well, captain, I regret that you do not accept our terms. It would be a saving of life."

"I positively cannot accept those terms."

"Very good, captain! I wish you good-night!"

Lieutenant Small departed. When he had gone Hal turned to Jack. His face was a little pale.

"Jack, old pard," he said, "I believe we are going to have a hard fight."

"Well, I think so, too."

"We are completely hemmed in. We are in the clutches of a dark villain if we are forced to surrender. We cannot hope to hold out forever against great odds. I feel sure this Leander Bishop is at the bottom of it all. Unless Grant sends us help we are lost."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST REPULSE.

Jack Clark listened to Hal's statement with his usual cool nerve. He smiled and replied:

"A battle is never lost until it has been fought. We shall pull out all right, I feel sure."

"I hope so."

"I believe so."

Strong guards were posted that night. There was little sleep for Jack Clark. He made the rounds every few hours and kept an eye out for everything.

But the night attack which he feared did not materialize. Evidently the Confederates chose to wait for dawn.

When the sun arose reveille was sounded and the Blues went to mess. They were soon in their intrenchments and ready for the day.

Nothing was to be seen of the Confederates.

If they were in position yet on the ridges it could not be seen. They certainly kept well out of sight.

By the middle of the forenoon Jack drew in his videttes and made ready for an attack. He felt sure that it was coming.

And his premise proved correct.

Suddenly a flag was seen fluttering over the bushes on the ridge. Then the glitter of arms flashed in the sun.

"They are coming," said Hal. "We are in for another fight, Jack."

"Well, we are good for it," said the young captain. "Stand firm, everybody! Remember how we whipped them last night. We can do it again!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" cheered the Blues.

On came the gray line. Down the ridge it swarmed. But now a sharp cry came from Hal. He pointed to the ridges on the opposite side.

"See!" he cried. "They are attacking us from both sides."

This was true. Confederate columns were seen advancing from the opposite side of the valley.

Jack noted this fact with interest. But it did not trouble him greatly.

It meant a division of his company. But he knew that it also meant a division of the Confederate force.

"All right," he said grimly. "Let them come on. Hal, you take charge of that side and I will of this. If you let them into the intrenchments I shall deem you unworthy of the trust."

"When they enter it will be over my dead body," said Hal.

So Hal took command of the Blues on that side and Jack on the other. The two lines came down at the charge.

Jack stood on the breastwork and waved his sword as an example to his men.

"Give it to them," he cried. "Beat them back, boys! Hurrah for the Union!"

The cheer went up:

"Hurrah for the Union!"

The Blues poured volley after volley into the ranks of the attacking foe. They reeled and reformed time and again.

Bishop was seen behind them yelling and urging them on. He never once appeared in front. Like the coward he was, he thus protected himself.

Again and again the brave little company of Blues hurled the foe back.

Again and again they came back. They were so much superior in numbers that as fast as one rank was expelled another came on.

And so the battle raged.

The Blues fought until they were so exhausted that they could hardly hold their places. Wounded and desperate, they still kept at it.

They had the advantage of the trenches and the Confederate lines were cut to pieces. For over two hours the battle raged.

Then, sullen and discomfited, the foe began to withdraw. Once again the day belonged to the Blues.

After their hard fight the foe was again repulsed.

So delighted was the brave little company that they mounted the breastwork and sent up cheer after cheer.

Then exhausted, they sank down in the trenches to rest.

During the battle the little six-pounder carried by the Blues did most deadly execution. It was well-manned and every shot told.

Throughout the struggle the Carew house had seemed to be a special target.

Its walls were riddled with bullets and its windows were all shot out.

Fortunately it did not catch fire. The inmates sought refuge in the cellar. Carew alone remained on the piazza watching the entire conflict.

That he was well satisfied with its result there could be no doubt. He walked out and grasped Jack's hand.

"Your men are tigers," he said. "They can fight like demons. You certainly have done nobly."

"Thank you," replied Jack. "I feel that we have won a great victory. Several times I feared we would be overcome."

"Do you think they will attack us again?"

"I cannot say. I hope not to-day."

They did not attack again that day. Toward night a scout came in with a most startling report.

"They are breakin' camp," he reported. "I heard that Johnston had sent word for every fighting man to report at Donelson, for Grant is marching upon that fort to capture it."

"Great Caesar!" exclaimed Hal. "That is quite possible. Every fighting man in this part of the country will be needed at Donelson."

"In that case we can come out of this affair claiming to be victors," cried Jack.

The spirits of the Blues rose at once. Soon the report was confirmed that Grimsby's men were on the retreat.

The outpost at Carew's Lad withstood the attacks upon it. No wonder its brave defenders felt good.

They had won a great victory. The next thing was to sally forth as soon as the coast was clear and locate the line of telegraph which General Grant desired to cut.

A few hours later definite information was received that Grimsby and his men were marching away to the east. In fact, Jack and several of his men climbed one of the ridges and saw the departing columns in the distance.

With a breath of relief Jack saw them go. He had dreaded a repetition of the desperate attack of the day before.

In fact, he had feared greatly that the Blues would not long be able to withstand such assaults.

It seemed as if the hand of Providence was in it all.

Carew was perhaps the most delighted of any.

"You have saved my plantation," he cried as he wrung Jack's hand. "If Bishop and his gang had succeeded in capturing this place, there would have been the deuce to pay. I should have been ruined."

"Well," said Jack, "I hope you will continue unmolested. I am sorry to say that we are now compelled to leave you."

"What?" exclaimed Carew in surprise. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"We shall go south a few miles to look up a line of telegraph. Then we shall return to Fort Henry and report to General Grant."

Carew looked troubled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope that Bishop won't be minded to return and give us trouble," he said. "If I could employ a guard to be trusted I should be glad."

"I'll do this for you, Carew," said Jack. "If you will send to me at any time while I am below here I will come at once to your assistance."

"Thank you," cried the planter heartily, as he gripped Jack's hand. "You are the best Yankee I ever knew."

Jack quickly ordered the Blues out and to prepare for the expedition in quest of the telegraph line.

He was determined to lose no time and to start at once. It was quite impossible for him to remain at Carew's just for the purpose of affording him protection.

Mabel Ward now appeared and expressed her gratitude to Jack in the warmest terms. The boy captain bowed and said:

"I have been pleased to serve you, Miss Ward. I hope this will not be our last meeting."

"It will be, I fear, unless you come to Carew's plantation," she said.

"I shall make it my duty to call here whenever I come this way," said Jack.

"You will be always welcome," cried Carew bluffly. "I hope, though, you will stop here on your return to Fort Henry."

"I will with pleasure, if it is possible," replied Jack. "But I must lose no time in returning to Fort Henry. It will be necessary for us to recruit our ranks, for we lost sixteen brave boys in this hard fight of ours."

"You were certainly hemmed in," said Carew. "And only the diversion of the attack on Donelson saved you."

"That is true."

The Blues were now all ready for the march. Jack again shook hands with Carew and Miss Ward. Then he took his place at the head of his men.

The Blues set out on their march. The plantation where they had been hemmed in by a superior force was soon left behind.

Once again the little company of youths plunged into the bottom lands and forded creeks and traversed timber belts for miles.

The scout who guided them was named McPherson. He was a Scotchman and one of the keenest in the business.

He led the way with unerring skill and knowledge of the country.

The Blues had been marching for hours, and it was nightfall when he cried:

"Halt! I think ye kin see the wires over yonder fernist that big sycamore."

This was true. A double line of wire was fastened to the tree. It was the secret telegraph by which Johnston kept informed of the movements of his army.

To cut this would be to cause the garrison at Donelson great inconvenience. It did not take the Blues long.

They sprung up the trunk of the trees, and with a few well-directed blows of a hatchet the work was done.

The wire was cut.

This was not enough. Jack proceeded to follow the line up for miles and rolled the wire up as he went on.

Finally when nightfall came they bivouacked in a little dell. The boys had raided a plantation near and had secured several razor-back pigs.

These made a delicious roast over the hot coals, and the Blues had a feast. It was a late hour when they rolled over in their blankets and went to sleep.

The next morning, with their mission accomplished, they set out upon the return.

They marched on rapidly over the turnpike which led toward Fort Henry.

Suddenly they came to a guideboard. On one side was the announcement that Fort Henry was not far distant.

Here Jack paused and said:

"This road goes to Fort Henry, Hal. The other to Donelson past Carew's house. If we go to the left we shall pass by Carew without seeing him. I believe I would like to call."

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK TO CAREW'S.

"Very well," agreed Hal. "We can make a detour past Carew's."

"No," said Jack. "I don't want to do that. I want the main body of our men to go on to Fort Henry. I think if I took a dozen men with me I could run down and see Carew, and he would help us to get horses to ride back with."

"Very good," agreed Hal. "I'll go on to Fort Henry with the boys."

So it was arranged.

Jack called Peters and instructed him to select a body-guard of twelve men.

This done they bade good-bye to the others. Hal, with his boys, marched on toward Fort Henry.

Jack, with his detachment, marched in the opposite direction toward Carew's. Down the dusty highway they went.

It was not long before they crossed a ridge and came in sight of the plantation.

It looked just the same to them as when they left it. A man was just riding into the yard on a white horse.

Jack at once recognized him as Carew himself. The young captain sent up a wild halloo.

Instantly the planter wheeled his horse.

He answered the cry, and then picking up the reins galloped toward the Blues. He swung his arms joyfully.

A few moments later he had reached the spot.

"Well, by hookey, I'm glad to see you," he cried. "This is more than I expected. Where is the rest of your company?"

"They have gone on to Fort Henry," replied Jack.

"The deuce you say! And you came down here to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll make you welcome. Did you find that line of telegraph?"

"We did."

"That's better yet. And you cut it?"

"Yes."

"From what I can hear Grant is making for Donelson. There'll be the deuce to pay over there. I know that Pillow has a great garrison and the fort is strong."

"That's all right, but General Grant will take it," said Jack.

"You think so?"

"I know it!"

"Well," said Carew, "there'll be an awful fight. You'll keep out of it?"

"By no means," said Jack. "We shall hope to be in the thick of it. We should feel bad to be left out."

"Don't you mind," said Carew. "You're too good a man to be shot. You shall stay here with me."

"Impossible," said Jack. "I only came around this way to see you. I must not dally. I must go on. Is Miss Ward well?"

"She is nicely. Won't you come into the house? I will call her."

Jack went into the house. As he passed into the great reception room he came face to face with Mabel.

The young girl seemed to have changed since Jack saw her last. Her face was haggard and there was a worried light in her eyes.

"I am glad to see you, Captain Clark," she said, and her color heightened. "You have kept your word and come back."

"I could not be so rude as to pass without a friendly word," said Jack.

"I have not forgotten the great service you did us."

"It was very little. I would it had been more."

"You saved me from the persecution of that villain, Bishop. But I live in dread that he may come back."

"If he has gone to take part in the defense of Fort Donelson there is a possibility that he may not."

The young girl shivered.

"It is not such as he who are sacrificed in battle," she said. "You may be sure he will come out unscathed."

Jack was bound to admit that she was right. He presently took his leave and was accompanied out by Carew.

"That is the only cloud upon my happiness at present, Jack," said the planter. "I live in fear that Bishop may come back."

"You have seen nothing of him since?"

"No."

"I hardly think I should fear him."

"Fear him? Oh, no! I shall be tempted to shoot him on sight."

The words had barely left Carew's lips when a startling thing happened.

A shot sounded outside and into the house dashed one of the Blues.

"Oh, Captain Clark," he cried, "the house is all surrounded. We are attacked on all sides."

"Attacked!" gasped Jack in surprise. "How can that be? There should be no Confederates near us."

"There evidently is," said Carew excitedly. "How many men have you with you, captain?"

"A dozen."

"Good! That will give us a little defence. We must hold them off. I told you that Bishop would come back."

A glance through the window told Jack the truth.

Fully fifty of the Confederates could be seen outside. They were battering the door trying to force an entrance.

At their head Jack saw Bishop.

The sight of the scoundrel stirred Jack greatly. He was glad now that he had stopped at Carew's.

Beside Bishop Jack saw the curious homely figure of Spruceby. The spy seemed right in his element.

The Confederates had already gained the porch of the house.

The Blues had managed to get inside the house, and they were making a desperate resistance.

They were fighting furiously. They barricaded the door.

But the wily Confederates knew the weakness of the door. With a few well-directed blows it was forced open. They rushed into the house.

The fight now went from room to room. At times the Blues held their foes. But the Grays seemed to have the advantage.

The floors were strewn with dead and dying. All the horrors of war were present.

From one room to another the Union soldiers went, being driven by the foe. But finally they were forced into a room in the centre of which was a ladder leading to the roof.

From the lower rooms the foe had driven them, and going higher each time the Blues now found themselves in this upper room.

Here the Blues held the stairway. It was only after a long and bloody fight that the foe were able to squeeze into the room.

It was quite wonderful. But Jack said in loud tones:

"Hold your ground, Blues. We will beat them yet."

The fight was taking place in the doorway, while Tom Peters in the thickest of it suddenly sprung to a side door.

Suddenly upon the ladder appeared the figure of Mabel Ward. She cried in ringing tones:

"This way for escape! This way!"

Jack Clark and his boys were having a desperate fight at the door. Tom Peters locked the side door, but just then Mabel Ward, pallid and fearful, came down the ladder and cried:

"This way if you would escape! Quick for your lives."

Jack turned and saw what she was doing. He saw himself that it was necessary to make some desperate move to escape.

At the foot of the ladder lay the figure of a Confederate officer. He had been shot when the room was first invaded.

Jack suddenly sent up a ringing cry:

"Back, Blues! Hurl them back and bar the door!"

Again the little detachment of soldiers put their energies into play. The result was that the door was barred and the Blues had a moment's respite.

But Jack gave them no time. As he sprung past Mabel he said:

"You had better come with us. Bishop is here."

"All right," agreed the young girl, "this ladder connects with the roof."

Up the ladder rushed the Blues full tilt. Jack stood aside and allowed Mabel to go up.

A few moments more and all had clambered out upon the roof. One side of the house only had been attacked. The roof on the other side connected with a side roof.

Down upon this all now slid. The Confederate soldiers were almost all of them inside the house.

So they never saw the Blues when, with Mabel in their midst, they slid down and dropped to the ground. But they had now rallied and burst into the room above, only to find their birds flown.

Bishop rushed to a window furious with chagrin and defeat. The fugitives were now half way to the stables.

From the other side of the house now swarmed the Confederates. They also slid down the roof as the Blues had.

Carew had flung open the stable doors. A couple of negro boys were cowering there. He jerked them to their feet.

"Bring out Black Bess," he shouted. "Put on the side-saddle. Lively! Can we hold them a moment, Captain Clark?"

"I think so," said Jack. "You are going to let Mabel ride away?"

"Yes, she can ride like a jockey. She will go down to her aunt's at Three Forks. I shall stay here and settle affairs with Bishop."

"Good!" said Jack. "Will it be safe for her to go without an escort?"

"I think so. The villains all seem to be here."

Jack and his men, in the security of the stable, had opened fire upon the guerrillas, for such they evidently were. Bishop, hanging safely in the rear, urged them on.

"Charge!" he yelled. "Break in on them! Give 'em the bayonet! Kill 'em!"

The Confederates, however, did not seem to care about running into the hot fire given them by the Blues.

They halted and fell back, seeking the cover of the house to avoid the volleys aimed at them:

Meantime Black Bess had been saddled and was in readiness. Mabel lightly sprung upon his back.

A door was opened on the other side of the stable.

Carew kissed his niece and said:

"Show your grit now, Mabel. Ride hard for Three Forks! I will come down for you as soon as we have settled this affair here."

The brave young girl smiled and touched the spirited mare with her whip.

The mare sprung forward and was out of the barn like a flash. Her good fair rider cleared the gate and were far down the lane before Bishop and his men could fairly realize it.

Then the villain, with a hoarse cry of rage, sprung forward.

"Go in there, you cowards!" he yelled. "Clean 'em out! Get me a horse till I catch that girl!"

The guerrillas dashed forward with such furious force that it seemed as if they would certainly succeed in their purpose.

CHAPTER IX.

PRISONERS.

Jack Clark's cool words kept his men firm, and they held their post in the barn, firing deadly volleys at the guerrillas.

The ground was strewn with dead and dying. Several of the Blues were badly wounded and two of them had been killed.

This reduced Jack's little force to ten, not counting himself and Carew. Perhaps the most daring of all in the party was Tom Peters, who kept right at the foe, exposing himself recklessly.

The fight continued in a desultory way for over an hour.

It was not easy to say with whom the advantage lay, but it was certain that the Blues were holding their own.

Bishop was discomfited and angry that he was unable to overwhelm the plucky defenders of the place. It maddened him that his game had been a failure.

The object of his attack upon the place, the capture of Mabel Ward, had failed. This was bitter to him.

The villain now urged his men on excitedly. He swore and raved furiously, but all to no purpose.

They could not capture the Blues in their present position. It was not long before the villain was bound to admit his defeat.

"We're holding them," said Jack. "I think that they will draw off soon, for it is costing them dearly to keep up the attack."

"Good!" cried Carew joyfully. "And I owe it all to you, Jack Clark. But for your timely arrival here my place would have been in ashes, my niece a captive and my life the forfeit. You can know that I am grateful to you."

"It is a matter of deep pleasure to me to defeat villainy," said Jack.

"Well, you have done it, I feel sure. Unless they get reinforcements they can not trouble us further. Ah, see that?"

The guerrillas were beginning to fall back behind the house. It was plain that Bishop was going to give up the battle.

The little company of Blues sent up a rousing cheer.

They were anxious to charge, but Jack restrained them.

"Let the scoundrels go," he said. "They will hardly trouble us again. I think Bishop has made his last stroke. I advise you, Mr. Carew, to leave this place for a time."

"I will do so," said the planter. "I agree with you that Bishop will hardly renew his game. If he, with others, goes to the defence of Donelson he will hardly come back this way."

"That is a likely view," said Jack. "Now, Mr. Carew, we will take our leave of you and join our comrades at Fort Henry. We wish you success."

The planter shook hands warmly with Jack and all the Blues. Then they prepared to take their leave.

They did not go until they had made quite sure that Bishop and his men would not return.

Finally the Blues marched away. They were soon on the road to Fort Henry.

For five miles they marched over the road they had traversed before and were half way on their journey when suddenly bullets began to whistle over their heads.

Jack gave the order to his men to deploy. They dropped into the bushes and the next moment they saw that which reassured them, blue uniforms ahead.

"They are Union troops!" cried Jack. "It's all right, boys!"

Then the young captain tied a handkerchief on the tip of his sword and waved it. In an instant the firing ceased.

A few moments later a sergeant and several privates came down the road. Jack stepped out into view.

"Hello, comrades," he cried.

"Hello," was the reply. "Who are you?"

"Captain Jack Clark, of the Fairdale Blues."

"I am Sergeant Smith, of the Third Iowa. We are on our way to join our forces about Donelson."

"Good!" cried Jack. "Then the advance is on?"

"Yes, the attack will soon be made."

"Is General Grant yet at Fort Henry?"

"He leaves there to-day, I believe."

"Then I have no time to lose. I must report to him at once."

"Wait a moment, friend."

"Well?"

The sergeant looked keenly at Jack.

"Did you say you were captain of the Fairdale Blues?"

"Yes."

"That company reported at the fort this morning. Its ranks seemed full!"

"Its ranks lacked us. I am their captain. Does not my uniform speak for itself?"

"It would seem so," said the sergeant. "I guess you are all right. But I'll fall back with you and report to our colonel."

"Very good!"

Down the road they now marched. The advance guard passed them and then they saw the columns of the regiment approaching.

At their head rode a commanding officer. As he came up the sergeant saluted and a halt was called.

"Ah, Sergeant Smith," said the colonel brusquely, "what have you here?"

"We have picked these men up on the road, Colonel Chester," said the sergeant. "They claim to be members of the company known as the Fairdale Blues."

The colonel knit his brows.

"Indeed," he said. "Where is the rest of the company?"

"I presume they are at Fort Henry," said Jack. "I left them at the cross roads below here, while I went to pay a visit to the Carew plantation."

"Ah," said Colonel Chester. "What was your business there?"

Jack flushed angrily.

"I don't feel that I am compelled to render account to you, sir," he said. "I am on a special mission for General Grant and I shall report to him alone."

The colonel's eyes snapped.

"Independent young cub, aren't you?" he said sharply. "I'll have you understand my superior rank gives me the right to dictate to you."

"I deny that. I do not belong to your regiment," retorted Jack.

"We shall see! Queer indeed what business you had at Carew's plantation. He is known as a Confederate sympathizer. This will bear investigation. I know that the Fairdale Blues are at Fort Henry. I will hold you until your identity is proved."

Jack was mad clear through.

"Sir," he cried, "you do that at your peril. I am on a

special mission for General Grant. I demand that you do not give me hindrance."

Colonel Chester seemed to be of the martinet type and of the sort disposed to be overzealous in the matter of duty. It was plain that he regarded Jack with much suspicion.

"Your explanations are not at all satisfactory to me," he declared. "Sergeant Smith, place this man and his followers under guard."

Jack was angry enough to fight, but he saw that this would avail nothing.

"This is infamous, sir, and I protest," he cried. "You shall pay for it dearly."

Colonel Chester wheeled his horse without reply. Jack and his companions were obliged to fall into line, and so were marched off toward Fort Donelson.

The emotions of the young captain were hard to describe.

He was boiling over with indignation. He considered the conduct of Colonel Chester as high-handed in the extreme.

But there seemed no help for it. For some while they marched on. Every moment Jack was getting further away from Fort Henry.

But this was as nothing compared with the humiliation of his position.

Held under guard in the position of culprits, it was hard to endure. And all owing to what he considered the pig-headed perversity of one man.

The regiment had marched on slowly for an hour, when a halt was called. For a long time they rested on their arms.

For a time it seemed a puzzle what the delay meant. Chester went on ahead with some members of his staff, but presently returned and ordered the regiment into camp.

From Sergeant Smith Jack managed to learn that the doughty colonel had reason to believe that the Confederates were in force in front of him.

For this reason he deemed it wise to remain where he was until assured that the coast was clear.

This was a most astonishing procedure as viewed by Jack. It would seem to indicate a spirit of cowardice.

"Pardon me, Sergeant Smith," he said, "but I must say your colonel is a very odd sort of a man. I can't understand him."

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders.

"To tell you the truth, captain, none of our boys believe he is doing right in holding you and your men under guard."

"It may be a serious thing for the colonel when General Grant hears of it."

"Humph! I don't believe he'll hear of it right away."

"Ah! Why?"

"Pshaw! At this rate Donelson will be attacked and captured before we ever get there."

"That is awful!" exploded the boy captain. "Every man will be needed at Fort Donelson. I protest against being detained this way. I consider Colonel Chester is doing wrong. I must see him!"

The sergeant yawned.

"I am sorry for you, captain. It would be of no use to apply."

Every moment Jack was getting more angry. While he had no passports or written credentials, he considered that his uniform and the presence of his men, as well as the logical situation, should establish his character.

"Colonel Chester is a man of exact ideas," said Smith. "It is his misfortune to have been endowed with that sort of a mind. He will never win a victory, for he is too slow and must proceed altogether by military plan. He is a martinet and sacrifices everything for a point of principle or for red tape."

"I don't propose to be sacrificed by his whims and cracks," cried Jack angrily. "I demand an investigation and my freedom now or Colonel Chester will pay for it very dearly."

"I am very sorry," said Sergeant Smith. "I would gladly help you if it was in my power."

"Do you mean that?"

"Certainly!"

"Will you do me a favor?"

"What?"

"Just watch your opportunity and send word to Lieutenant Hal Martin, of the Fairdale Blues, at Fort Henry, that I am held here as a suspected spy by Colonel Chester."

"A messenger for Fort Henry is ready to start now."

"Will you do that for me, Smith? I will repay you well."

"I will do it, captain," said the sergeant. "I know you are all straight and I feel sorry for you."

"I thank you."

Just at that moment a corporal and two privates appeared. They marched up and one placed a hand on Jack's shoulder.

CHAPTER X.

SENTENCED TO DEATH.

Jack gave a start of surprise. Sergeant Smith had stepped back. The corporal said gruffly:

"Colonel Chester wants to see you. Fall in! March!"

Without a word Jack fell in between the guards. They

marched away at a quick step. The boy captain felt a thrill of joy at this unexpected development.

In a few moments they approached a wide spreading tree. Beneath this were chairs and a table. Colonel Chester and several of his captains stood about.

Just under the tree, however, stood a figure at sight of which Jack gave a start. He blinked and stared again.

"Leander Bishop!" he ejaculated.

It was the guerrilla and Confederate leader. He was not bound nor did he have the appearance of a prisoner.

In fact, his face wore an expression of malignant triumph. He fixed his ferret eyes upon Jack.

Colonel Chester, cold and cynical, sat at the table. He looked up at Jack in a perfunctory way.

"Bring the prisoner here," he commanded. The guards marched Jack up to the table. All this was most astonishing to the boy captain.

"It seems, my friend," said Colonel Chester in icy tones, "that your villainy has found you out. You played a clever game, but I was fortunate enough to see it in time."

"You will oblige me if you will be less ambiguous in your remarks, sir," said Jack hotly. "I am not accustomed to being called a villain and I shall call you to account for it."

Chester looked at Jack contemptuously.

"Your bluff game will not work," he said. "The mask is off. You are Tom Howard, the Confederate spy."

"What?" gasped Jack.

"It is useless for you to deny it. It is well known that Jack Clark, captain of the Fairdale Blues, is at this moment at Fort Henry with his company. The masquerade you have assumed is a failure."

"One moment," said Jack tensely, "I cannot believe you are such a fool——"

"What?"

"I mean just what I say! Whose word are you taking for it?"

"This gentleman here, Mr. Leander Bishop, our scout and spy and a man thoroughly loyal to the Union."

Jack turned and glanced at Bishop.

"That fellow?" he exclaimed. "Are you mad, Chester? He is Leander Bishop, a Confederate guerrilla and bushwhacker. You are mad to believe him."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Bishop. "He tries to turn it upon me. What do you think of that for nerve, Colonel Chester?"

The colonel's face was very hard.

"Bishop," he said, "you identify this man as Tom Howard, the spy?"

"I do!" replied Bishop flatly.

"You are a scoundrel and a liar!" cried Jack. "This is beyond human comprehension. Why, Colonel Chester, you

are mad to take this man's word. He is an adroit scoundrel. I am just what I claim and I can prove it."

"What are your proofs?" asked Chester.

"My uniform, my badge, my sword, the word of my fellow soldiers. Send a despatch to Fort Henry. General Grant himself will vouch for me."

"He is trying to gain time, Colonel Chester," said Bishop with a bland smile. "He is certainly clever. He makes a good argument."

Colonel Chester nodded and turned to the corporal.

"Strip that blue uniform from him," he said. "Take him out on yonder ridge and shoot him."

Jack's head swam. He could not control himself.

"You infamous straight-laced, pig-headed old fool!" he cried. "What would the country come to if it was in the hands of such as you? You are committing a foul crime! You are taking the life of a fellow soldier, and——"

"Stop!" roared the colonel. "Shall I give orders to gag you?"

Jack said no more. He saw that it was of no use. An awful wave of horror swept over him.

Was it possible that he was to give up his young life in this humiliating way? Was he to be such a sacrifice? Every possible resource occurred to him.

But he could think of none that would avail. Death stared him in the face.

The corporal and his guard advanced. They took their places and the order came cold and stern: "Fall in, march."

Bishop stood the picture of exultant joy. It was the sight of his evil visage as much as anything else that stirred Jack.

It was awful to think of. He, Jack Clark, captain of the Fairdale Blues, to be marched out and shot like a dog all under the misapprehension of a pig-headed colonel. He could not believe it.

It was a horrible dream. It seemed as if the clutch of a nightmare was upon him. He tried to shake it off.

He saw the lines of blue soldiers in the background. On a distant hill a vidette was posted.

He knew well enough that a foe was not within miles.

But here was this incompetent colonel holding his command in the fear that such a foe was ahead. Holding them instead of advancing and feeling his way, while the fatal delay meant much for those at Donelson. It was awful to Jack.

All his nature rebelled against such atrocious incompetence. In his desperation he appealed to the men beside him. He could see sympathy and belief in their faces.

"For heaven's sake, men, don't send me to so unjust a fate," he cried. "You know that it is not true. I am a

Union officer, loyal to the flag, and my blood will be upon your heads."

"Sh!" said the corporal. "We have our orders and must obey them."

"But—it is murder! Your colonel is in fearful error——"

"God bless you, boy, every man of us believes it. A look into your honest face is enough. You'll never be shot," said the corporal in a whisper.

A wild hope seized Jack.

"You will make no mistake if you can avert the sentence," he said. "I am just what I claim to be. Do you see?"

"Yes. Yes. Sergeant Smith has it planned to save you. One of our boys, Roland by name, will come up and recognize you. Do you see? That will be his word against Bishop's. Chester cannot shoot you in the face of such doubt."

Even as the corporal spoke, Smith, with a companion, came running up. The latter cried excitedly.

"Captain Clark! What is all this? Do they mean to shoot you? What for?"

At once Jack took the cue.

"Hello, Roland!" he cried. "You know me! You will save me. I am accused falsely of being a spy!"

"Save you? Of course, I will!" cried the clever young private. "You'll never go to such a fate while I can help it. Where is Colonel Chester?"

At once the corporal ordered his men about. When they reached the wide spreading tree Chester angrily stepped out:

"What is this?" he cried. "Why are not my orders executed?"

"There is a mistake, sir," said the corporal. "Roland here knows the prisoner and says he is surely Captain Clark."

Chester turned his gaze upon Roland. His eyes snapped. Like all martinets, he did not relish the knowledge of a mistake.

"Oh, he does, eh? Is his word any better than that of Bishop?"

"Yes, sir," cried the plucky private. "My word is perfectly good, sir, and I never swore a man's life away. I know this man for Captain Clark."

One moment Colonel Chester wavered. Then he turned.

"Where is Bishop?" he asked. But the spy had disappeared. Colonel Chester's brow was like a thundercloud. He hesitated and it was plain to see that he was not at all pleased with the turn of affairs. He disliked to admit that he was wrong.

"Private Roland," he said sternly, "how do you know this man to be Captain Clark?"

"I knew him in Virginia, sir. He was in the battle of Bull Run with his company."

"Under these circumstances," said Chester stiffly, "I suspend the sentence of death pending further investigation. Take the prisoner away."

"One moment, Colonel Chester," said Jack quietly.

"Well, sir?"

"Is this man Bishop in your confidence?"

"What is that to you?"

"Much, sir! You are fighting for the same flag that I am. Your men's lives are precious to the Union. This scoundrel, if you trust him, will betray you and lead you into a death trap. I want you to believe me."

"I am not a fool," said Chester stiffly. "I am capable of judging for myself."

"Very good, sir! That is your privilege. But I wish to know if you intend to hold myself and men under guard longer?"

"Until I can satisfy all my doubts regarding your character."

"Then I beg you to satisfy them quickly, for I am anxious to rejoin my command and serve at Fort Donelson."

"I choose to take my own time?"

"Very good, sir."

Jack was led away in a decidedly ill humor. His life had hung by a thread. He said to the corporal:

"I want you to thank Private Roland. If it ever comes in my way I shall do him a good service."

"I will do so, captain. I suppose you are anxious to join the Blues at Fort Henry."

"Yes, and there is no time to lose. If General Grant gets away from there before I can report to him, I may not be able to get my men to the front in time."

"It looks as if we would not get there either," growled the corporal. "This Colonel Chester makes us tired. This regiment is made up of fighting men and we only want a fair chance."

"It is too bad!"

"See here, captain, every man John of us is anxious to see you get away. Now when you get back with your comrades we will fix it up so that you can break guard and run. We will fire over your heads. See?"

Jack was overcome.

"Do you mean that?" he cried joyfully. "You shall be well repaid. I will tell General Grant the whole story, and I know he will send you a new colonel."

"That is what we want. I tell you Chester is no good!"

This plan of the guard was made known to Tom Peters and the others. It is needless to say that all at once entered heartily into the spirit of it.

For another hour Colonel Chester remained inactive, sending scouts and spies out in all directions to locate an invisible enemy.

The guiding hand of all this was Bishop's. The spy knew well the value of holding back all the forces possible. He was working for the interests of the Confederacy.

But in the presence of Bishop in the Union camp Jack was assured of one important fact, and this was that he was no longer in a position to molest the young girl Mabel Ward, who doubtless was safe and well at Three Forks.

CHAPTER XI.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

The daring plan of Sergeant Smith to liberate the Blues only awaited the proper moment. Meanwhile Colonel Chester was waiting for his scouts to come in.

The day was drawing to a close.

Jack was in an impatient frame of mind. None knew better than he the importance of getting back to Fort Henry at once.

It was just at dusk that Colonel Chester mounted his horse and rode out on the picket line. It was plain that the regiment was to bivouac on the spot.

The soldiers were getting things ready for the camp. Suddenly Sergeant Smith advanced to the guard line placed about the prisoners and gave Jack a signal.

At once the boy captain spoke sharply to his men.

A quick dash was made for that part of the guard line next the woods. In an instant an uproar arose.

Shots and yells filled the air. The Blues ran like fleet-footed deer for the woods. Bullets whistled over their heads.

The pursuit was kept up for a mile. But they were not overtaken nor was one of their number harmed.

Into the rapidly growing darkness they plunged. After a time they came out again on the turnpike and knew that they were safe.

"Now for Fort Henry, boys!" cried Jack. "I hope we reach there in time."

"So do I!" cried Tom Peters. "It seems as if we would never get back to our comrades."

"We had a close call!"

"That's right! I'd rather fall into Johnston's hands than Chester's. We might expect greater mercy from the foe."

All concurred in this. But even as Jack spoke a startling sound caught their hearing.

It was the tramp of feet. The boys shrank into the underbrush. They saw a line of armed men coming up the road.

They saw at once that it was an advance guard of some kind. It needed but a little scrutiny to divulge a startling fact.

They were Confederates.

"Whew!" whispered Tom Peters. "What's up now? What are they doing here?"

"Doubtless it is some division on its way to reinforce Fort Donelson," said Jack. "At their present rate they will stumble upon Chester."

"Great Caesar!" gasped Tom. "He ought to be warned. They will take him in the rear and he will be cut to pieces."

The startling possibility of this occurred with great force to all. It led to other and trite conclusions.

"I think I see it all," whispered Jack. "This is Bishop's trap. You remember that it is due to him that the Iowa regiment is at present in statu quo where it is. He is holding Chester there waiting for these troops to come up, when they will have him between them and the fort."

This startling conclusion caused the veins of all to tingle. To make sure that a large force was behind, Jack climbed a nearby tree.

His suspicions were verified.

For a mile down the highway he could see the lights of a great army. It was moving on swiftly, stealthily and gradually drawing the meshes of the net about Chester.

There was no hesitancy on the part of the Blues. Much as they disliked Chester, they could not rejoice in his defeat and destruction, knowing that it was a blow to the Union cause.

"We must go back," said Jack. "There is no time to lose. They must be warned in time."

So the boys started back down the highway and before the advance guard. They ran on rapidly.

It seemed an age before they were hailed by the first Union picket. By the strangest coincidence in the world this man was Private Roland.

He hailed Jack and his companions with surprise.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. "Don't you think it risky?"

"No," replied Jack. "Duty has brought us back. A Confederate army is creeping down upon your rear."

"What?" gasped Roland.

"It is true! Take us to Colonel Chester at once. We have no time to lose. Quick action must be made."

"Let me give you advice."

"What?"

"Don't go personally to Colonel Chester. He has taken on an ill humor and no good will come of it. Let me call the guard and send him word."

"Very good," agreed Jack. "It shall be as you say."

So the Blues waited outside the picket line while the word was carried to Chester. In a few moments the Union camp was in a state of the wildest confusion.

The troops flew to arms and the best possible position was chosen to make a defence.

There was no time to lose, for the advance guard was already upon them. The darkness of the night was broken with the flashes of musketry.

The first move of the Confederates was to throw out wings to envelope Chester. Whatever might be said of the Union colonel he was brave to a fault.

He exposed himself recklessly. He could be seen riding madly up and down through the smoke and flame.

With the first onset the Union forces seemed to bend back. But Chester threw all his reserves into the center and it held firm.

For some while there was desperate fighting in the darkness. Jack Clark and his companions avoided the confusion of the conflict and kept off to the left, from which point they could see the fight.

They had been without arms, but now they were able to secure muskets from the field and ammunition from the cartridge boxes of dead soldiers.

Thus equipped, they for a time kept up a steady fire.

But it was easy for Jack to see that the end was close at hand and not to be averted.

The Confederate forces were completely enveloping Chester and his regiment. It seemed like carnage.

Steadily the brave men in blue fought. Pluckily the gray line swept on.

Overpowering numbers was the story. The Confederates soon broke through the blue ranks and the end came.

A bugle call went up over the field. Again and again it pealed. The conflict ceased.

The Confederates drew back and the jaded men in blue, panting and wounded and exhausted, rested on their arms. The regiment of Colonel Chester, that but a few hours before had marched so bravely up the highway, was cut into remnants and had surrendered.

It was a bitter dose for the haughty martinet of a colonel. He handed his sword over to the Confederate general and the affair was ended.

Over eight hundred brave Union men were thus captured.

Jack Clark and his companions had withdrawn to a

safe position overlooking the scene. They had no idea of joining in the surrender.

"It is the treacherous work of Bishop," said Jack. "Let us get away from here as soon as we can. We must be at Fort Henry before morning."

"Too bad!" said Peters. "I feel sorry for Chester's men. It is all his fault."

"It certainly is," agreed Jack, "but he is not alone the sufferer. In a great measure he is culpable."

The boys now withdrew cautiously into the woods. They soon found that it would be necessary to make a long detour to the south.

For the Confederates were on all sides of them. They found that the danger of capture was very great.

Once in creeping through the underbrush a party of the foe passed within a few feet. Only the extreme darkness saved them from discovery.

But finally the boys came out into a rough road which led southward.

As they were creeping along this voices were heard. At once they sank down into the bushes.

A number of horsemen were coming up the old road.

They seemed to be fully a score in number. Just as they reached the top of the rise in front of the Blues they drew rein.

"Confound you, Allen; I believe you have lost the way!"

"I think we are all right, Leander," replied a squeaky voice. "This road comes out at Three Forks."

"If you've lied to me I'll hang you!"

It was Bishop, with a score of his guerrilla band. Jack drew a deep breath. Tom Peters clutched his arm.

"Hang me if ye want to," snarled the man called Allen "but if ye do ye'll never find yer way out."

"I don't feel like joking, Allen," said the ruffian with an oath. "We've corralled Chester and his regiment and I'll get a colonel's commission for that. Now I want that girl. She will marry me to-night or I'll know the reason why."

"Ye're doin' well, Bishop!" retorted the other. "But if ye'll take the advice of an old man ye'll let the woman alone. There's no luck in women."

"No croaking, you black owl you!" gritted Bishop. "Ride on, and may the Lord help you if we are not at Three Forks in twenty minutes."

The cavalcade clattered on down the old road.

Jack and his boys had listened to all with intense emotion. To them it was a revelation.

"Well," whispered Tom Peters, as he regained his feet, "here's a pretty mess. It looks bad!"

"We are in luck," said Jack.

"How so?"

"We have learned of the plot just in time to thwart it."

"What? Do you intend——"

"Yes, I intend to follow these scoundrels and settle this question forever. Once I get my hands on that Bishop I will hang him higher than Haman!"

The boys voiced this sentiment heartily.

"They outnumber us," said Peters. "But that won't prevent our fighting them."

"By no means!"

So the Blues, led by Jack, set out down the old road. They walked and ran until it seemed as if they would never reach the end of the road.

But finally the trees broke into a clearing. They came upon an open, where three roads crossed.

This was called Three Forks.

In the center was a guide-post. Jack lit a match and studied it.

But he had no means of telling thereby which road to take. He finally hit upon the most logical plan.

This was to examine the roadway for the hoof-prints of the horses. They were found without trouble.

Down this road therefore the handful of Union boys ran. Suddenly upon their vision against the sky burst a dull glow. It every moment grew brighter.

It struck a chill to Jack's heart.

He knew well what it meant. Even before they came upon the scene he could see it all.

A plantation house was in flames. It was the home of Mabel Ward's aunt and where she had sought refuge.

The outbuildings were already in ashes. As the Blues rushed into the glare of light they saw the figure of an aged colored man arise from the ground.

Blood streamed down his black face. He was frightfully wounded, but his spirit of loyalty was strong as he clutched a heavy club and stepped in the path of the Blues.

"Ole Pomp got it hard dat time," he cried, "but it done take a wuss crack on de head dan dat fo' to kill him. Ah reckon yo' kin kill me, but yo' ain' goin' no funder!"

"All right, old man," shouted Jack. "Have no fear! We are friends! Don't you see our uniforms?"

"Massy Lordy! It ain' de Yankees!" screamed the dark-eye. "Ise done glad ob dat. Oh, fo' de lan's sakes, help Missy Mabel. Dey done carried her away!"

"They carried her away?" repeated Jack. "Let us have the truth, Pomp. Which way did they go?"

"I done heah dem say dey was goin' for White Spring," replied the coon. "Oh, massa, let dis po' ole black man go wif yo'. I done git yo' a hoss!"

"Can you get us all horses, Pomp?" asked Jack eagerly.

The negro looked at the boys and began to count on his fingers.

"Dere am four out in de yard," he cried. "De bes' I kin do, massa!"

Jack turned to the boys.

"It's too bad!" he said. "We must split forces. Four of you are to go with me. Peters, I shall expect you to take the others and go back to Fort Henry at once. I will join you there later."

Peters hesitated. Plain disappointment showed in his face.

"I wish I could go with you, captain," he said.

"No," replied Jack. "It is better not. Unless you can get horses it is of no use. We shall go to White Spring."

Peters' face lit up.

"All right," he agreed. "Your orders shall be obeyed, captain."

In a few moments old Pomp had led them to the stable yard. One of the stables had been overlooked by the guerrillas.

It happened that there were saddles for the horses in this stable. In a very few moments the steeds were saddled.

The scene about the house was a most distressing one. The guerrillas had spared none except old Pomp, whom they had left for dead.

Six of the negro servants and the maiden aunt of Mabel Ward, as well as the white overseer, Jabez King, had been shot down and their bodies thrown into the flames.

No more dastardly outrage had been committed since the breaking out of the war. It was one of the most terrible of all the sad incidents of those dark days of 1862.

But there was only one thought uppermost in the mind of Jack Clark. This was to overtake the fiends and rescue Mabel Ward.

With this one object in view the Blues dashed away.

CHAPTER XII.

ALL ENDS WELL.

Down the highway toward White Spring rode brave Jack Clark and his three companions.

Tom Peters and his comrades followed on foot. Thus matters were at midnight of that memorable night in 1862.

On rode Jack Clark.

Down the rough highway they galloped madly. For an hour they rode on until suddenly lights flashed in the darkness.

Ahead lay the streets of the town. Soon the Blues pulled rein, for Jack was not reckless and knew the danger of riding blindly into a Confederate stronghold.

But the streets of the town seemed deserted. The oil lamps burned low. The quartette ventured into their glare.

They rode slowly along, looking keenly into every side street. A yard debouched from the street up to the piazza of a rude hotel.

In the windows lights flashed. At posts without a score of horses were hitched.

Jack pulled rein instantly and turned into a little side street. He dismounted instantly.

"Tie your horses, boys," he said in a low tone. "We may never need them again, but we will go ahead on the assumption that we will."

The boys complied. Then Jack led the way boldly around into the tavern yard.

A couple of guards were by the guerrillas' horses. Jack kept out of their range of vision. In a few moments they were upon the tavern piazza.

They crept around the side of the building. Loud voices could be heard within.

There was singing and the stamping of feet and the clinking of glasses. Loud shouts went up at times.

Jack and his companions crept to the window. It was of the pattern that extended to the floor and Jack saw at a glance that a hard kick would cause it to fly open.

Then he peered into the room.

The scene which he beheld for a moment held him spell-bound. He stared at it with horror.

About the tap room of the tavern were ranged the score of rough guerrillas.

They were seated, some on tables, some on chairs, some on the window ledges. Each held a whiskey bottle in his hand.

Behind the bar was a long mustached man, the proprietor of the place. In the centre of the floor stood the erect figure of a young girl, with her wealth of dark hair down her back, her eyes flashing scorn and defiance, her hands clenched, and in every sense a perfect type of the high-spirited Southern girl.

Mabel Ward was not a shrinking, timid victim of fear. She faced the motley crew of ruffians like a Diana.

At her right stood the villain, Bishop, leering and exultant. Before both was a cowering negro in the black garb of a preacher.

"Hooray!" yelled the circle of guerrillas. "Drink to ther bride! Drink to her pooty face and a long life an' a merry one!"

The bottles went up for a fresh draught. Then, with a common impulse, there arose the rough chorus of a song.

"Hooray! Hyar's to the bridegroom! May he never git a pootier wife!"

"Hooray! Hooray!"

But Bishop now held up his hand and silence fell upon the room.

"Now, Uncle Aaron," said the villain, "I want you to tie the knot and tie it hard. If you don't speak up sharp I'll cut yer ears off."

The crowd yelled with approval.

The cowering old negro preacher put up his hands and said:

"Fo' de Lor, massah, I kain't marry de young woman to yo' truly an' religiously and in the grace of ther Holy Spirit if she do not gib her consent."

"Consent, be hanged!" roared Bishop. "Speak the words, you old black hypocrite! Speak 'em, I say!"

"No," cried Mabel in ringing tones. "He is a man of God, and he will not do a wrong act. I trust him for that."

Uncle Aaron's old eyes flashed with religious spirit, and he cried:

"Yo' am right, young missy. Dey done may kill dis po' ole boddy, but de soul it go up to God wifout a stain upon it. I is gwine to stand fo' yo'. An' yo' miserable sinners, listen to de warnin' ob de Holy Spirit, yo' am' got no time to lose, fo' de day am comin' an'——"

But Bishop, with a yell of rage struck the back of his hand across the aged exhorter's mouth. The negro went to the floor in a heap.

But Bishop jerked him upon his feet and roared savagely:

"Come now, no more of your hypocritical cant. Speak the words, or I'll hang you up by your thumbs."

"I calls on de good Lord to punish de wicked oppressor," shouted the aged preacher. But the gang set up a howl:

"Hang him up! Bring him to time. He wants a touch of the cat-o'-nine-tails!"

"Give me a rope!" roared Bishop, and one was passed him. He threw it over a hook in the ceiling.

But just at that moment Mabel chanced to glance to the window. What she beheld there gave her a thrilled start.

She saw Jack Clark's face against the glass. She saw him beckon to her.

She caught the idea instantly. Like a flash she dashed to the long window. With one kick of Jack's foot it flew open.

Before any in the room had an idea of what it all meant Mabel had darted through the window and Jack Clark's musket was leveled at Bishop's head.

"Take her away, boys, quick!" cried the young captain. "Ride! Ride for your lives! I will hold them at bay!"

Mabel darted away with the three Boys in Blue. Jack Clark held the musket leveled at Bishop a moment and the impulse was upon him to pull the trigger.

But he did not. For this he was not sorry afterward.

For a moment the guerrillas were so astounded that they could not speak or act. But in another moment Bishop, like a panther, sprung forward.

"Fiends and furies!" he yelled. "Do you see what that means? After her, you gaping fools! Catch that blue-coated cur! After them all!"

Jack stepped back and hurled the shutter to. Then he leaped from the piazza and darted for the horses.

The guard in the confusion could not tell him from one of their own men. In the gloom his uniform was not seen.

To aid in the deception, as Jack vaulted upon the back of the nearest horse he cried:

"After them, ye fools! Don't let 'em get away! Come on!"

Away he dashed down the street. He rode like mad.

But behind him thundered the guerrillas. Jack did not know where he was going, nor did he care.

On he rode madly. He was some few hundred yards in advance when a startling thing happened.

The roadway ahead became blocked with horses and riders. A loud voice rang out:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

Jack drew rein and for a moment a sense of danger impelled him to swerve his horse to the right and clear the roadside fence.

But he did not do so. He pulled his horse up in the midst of the cavalcade. Sabres flashed over his head. A stern voice called out:

"Who are you? Confederate or Union?"

In an instant a sort of intuition told Jack the thrilling truth that he was among friends. A Confederate would have said "Yank," instead of Union.

"I am Captain Jack Clark, of the Fairdale Blues," he cried.

"What brings you here?"

"I am pursued by guerrillas! Divide and let them in and you will capture them."

"Guerrillas!" was the cry. "Perhaps they are the chaps we have been sent after, the Bishop gang?"

"Yes, and Bishop is at their head!" cried Jack. "Let them come in!"

In an instant the cavalry ranks opened. The guerrillas, as Jack had done, came around the turn in the road so swiftly that they could not check their speed.

They dashed right between the files of cavalry. The conflict was short and sharp.

In less time than it takes to tell it they were overpowered and were made prisoners.

But Bishop, the dark scoundrel, had gone down with a

sabre thrust in the side. He lay by the roadside, and Jack and the Union colonel bent over him in the light of a lantern.

"Hang ye all!" gritted the dying villain. "I'm done for, but I turned things for the Confederacy while I lived. I gave Chester and his men up to 'em. I'm all done, an' the girl slipped me, but I don't care for that. You won't forget Bishop right away!"

He died with hard words upon his lips. The Union colonel turned to Jack:

"You are Captain Jack Clark?"

"Yes."

"I have been sent here by General Grant. He has heard of your brave work. Your men are safe at Fort Henry. He directed me to find you, hang Bishop and tell you to report at once, for a general move will be made upon Donelson to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" cried Jack with delight. "Then the battle has not yet been fought?"

"No."

"I feared that we would be left out of it. I can assure you that this is joyful news to me."

"I can understand that."

"But—on this road did you not meet three of my men with a young woman?"

"Yes," replied the colonel of cavalry. "They are at this moment riding over the road to Carew's plantation. I am going on further with my men. I think if you went on to Carew's you would find your men there."

"Thank you, colonel," replied Jack. "You will hear from the Blues at Donelson."

"I have no doubt of it, and with credit, too. I wish you success."

"Thank you."

Jack passed through the cavalry squad and rode on. He felt that he had accomplished a good night's work.

When he rounded a bend in the road after an hour's ride and saw lights ahead, he knew that Carew was at his old home, and happy once more with his niece in his charge and his foe Bishop could scheme against him no more.

Jack rode into the yard and dismounted. He was at once hailed by one of his own men.

It was Tom Peters.

The plucky little corporal and his men after leaving Jack had gone on to Carew's. They were conferring with the planter when Jack's comrades, with Mabel in their charge, rode up.

It was needless to say that it was a happy reunion. Jack and his men were made royally welcome by Carew.

It was near the morning hour when they bade adieu to

Carew and his fair niece. In parting Jack held Mabel's hand a moment and said gallantly:

"I wish you the best of earthly blessings, Miss Ward. We may never meet again, but I hope that one worthy of your trust will some day present himself to you. May you be happy!"

"I need hardly say that I hope your happiness will be assured, for I have learned that that is already a fact," she said sweetly. "I have heard much of the young woman who holds your heart, and I know that she is good and pure and true."

"Though, there is a great gulf between us."

"It will some day be bridged."

"Good-bye, Miss Ward."

"Good-bye, Captain Clark."

Jack and his Blues rode away. He never saw the planter's fair niece again. But the memory of her face was always pleasantly with him.

Shortly after dawn the young captain and his men rode into Fort Donelson. It is hardly necessary to say that they got a warm reception.

Jack at once repaired to General Grant's headquarters. The great commander took him by the hand.

"Clark, I know what you have done," he said warmly. "Words of praise are of little use. This is a time for action and not words. I will say that I am pleased. In an hour we shall march for Donelson. May the God of battles be with us!"

Within an hour the great army was on its way. The Blues marched away with it to win fresh laurels and fame on that famous battlefield.

The incidents of that great battle and the part the Blues took in it will form the subject matter for another narrative, which we will present in the near future.

THE END.

Read "TRAPPED BY A TRAITOR; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY IN A SCRAPE," which will be the next number (12) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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